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# THROUGH THE CHRYSALIS

BY F. F. MONTRESOR

AUTHOR OF "THE BURNING TORCH," ETC.

" He who bends to himself a joy  
Does the wingèd life destroy."

W. BLAKE

LONDON  
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.  
1910





DEDICATED  
TO  
MY MOTHER



## PREFACE

I HAD called this story "Bitter-sweet," and it was actually in print when a friend saw a book of that name on a railway stall, and kindly warned me that the pretty title was already taken, and was someone else's property.

That being the case, Mr. Murray is having new covers made, and is putting another name on the title-page; but I think that E. A. Rowlands will forgive me for letting "Bitter-sweet" stand as a heading to the pages, for to cancel that would make it impossible for my butterfly to flutter her wings this autumn.

We are within a few days of St. Luke's summer now, and the kind saint seems to be already exerting his mellowing influence.

The Babette of my story did finally find her way through the meshes she had wound round and round her life, as the butterflies have found their way through the chrysalis—those pathetic autumn butterflies that have so short a season as we count time.

I have heard that the bright colours on their wings are developed by their struggles to get free, that if one were to be so cruelly misguided as to slit the cocoon in order to save so much trouble, a very dull and colourless butterfly would emerge—a poor ghost of a drab-coloured creature, with not a jewelled flash about it! Well, a preacher pointed the moral of that fact in a

sermon to which I listened while this story was simmering, for all the preachers down the ages have drawn morals from butterflies, and all the poets and the lovers have found in them similes.

Only while the web still envelops the struggling being, one sees a greedy grub and another sees the "wingèd life," and the discerners of the last need be neither preacher nor poet. It is only needful to walk hand in hand with the God who is falsely called blind, but whose eyes can not only pierce through stone walls but have the very potent power of making that to grow which their glance rests on.

F. F. M.

*October, 1910.*

## FIRST PART



# THROUGH THE CHRYSALIS

## CHAPTER I

It was early June. In the ancient and once royal town of Compiègne roses bloomed in every possible place. Dynasties might wax and wane, humanity adorn itself in periwigs or red caps or straw hats, but they shed their impartial fragrance all the same.

Madame Berne's pension stood back from the steep old street that skirts the walls of the palace. You stepped into the courtyard, through a little door that was cut in a big door, to find yourself surrounded by the house on either side. Roses in neat green tubs smiled at you with carefully-tended sweetness. Madame Berne loved them, and flowers, though indifferent to politics, appreciate love!

The house was of a pinkish tone of colour and garnished with green venetian blinds. It had a cheerful and friendly aspect, in spite of the fact that the plaster was peeling off in bits. Groups of chairs and small round tables stood about, and tumblers filled with flowers gave a touch of grace to the arrangements.

During the summer months a few English people invaded the Pension Berne, but all the year round it was the permanent home of respectable old French ladies. Childless widows, ancient spinsters, very old dames who had outlived their relatives, drifted into this backwater. They paid surprisingly little for board and lodging, but they settled down for the remainder of their lives, and they brought their goods and chattels



with them. Such quaint bits of solid furniture graced their rooms, and these were left by will to Madame Berne, who ran the house. She was to look after her lodgers when they were ill; she was to arrange their funerals; and, in return, she was to have the furniture. Poor old ladies! it seemed a melancholy plan! but it suited both parties, and it worked wonderfully well.

Madame Berne was a kind woman who liked old people and loved children. It was a chagrin to her that the two predilections clashed! She could not have families of noisy boys and girls in her pension, because they disturbed her old ladies—those permanent guests who kept the house on a tolerably safe basis, but who watched with jealous eyes the fleeting invaders of the summer season.

They sat in their own especial chairs in the sunny courtyard, and talked and crocheted and gossiped together, did these old dames! They were not embittered or soured, but they were shrewdly tenacious of their own established rights, and they were immensely inquisitive about the summer boarders, who had not anchored for ever in this backwater, but who just swam in for a fortnight, or maybe a month, splashing about and stirring up the waters, making miniature storms and waves, and swimming off again. The old ladies were like a Greek chorus: they commented, appraised, and judged. They were sharp observers, too, and sometimes gave Madame Berne words of advice which were not always welcome, but which she received with patience, as part of the accorded privilege of age.

One afternoon a man and a girl came rather wearily into the courtyard of the Pension Berne. It was about five o'clock, and some of the little tables were set with teacups, and a few of the old ladies were sitting in the wicker-chairs. The place seemed homelike and peaceful in the softening mellow light of late afternoon.

"It looks nice! It looks as if it would do," the girl said in English.

The man sat down at once, as if he were too tired to walk a step farther.

"You can arrange it all," he said.

The girl, with an anxious frown puckering her young forehead, turned to one of the old ladies.

"My father and I have been obliged to stop at this station, for he turned faint in the train," she explained. "When we got out I asked the advice of the guard. I asked him where we could find a place that was comfortable and quiet, and not too expensive. He bade me go to Madame Berne's pension. This is it, is it not?"

She spoke now in tolerably fluent French, though with an accent.

The chorus made mental notes. Undoubtedly English, but poverty-stricken—artists or musicians, perhaps. Madame Berne must be careful.

The man's coat was somewhat green on the shoulders; the girl's blouse was darned, and her boots decidedly the worse for wear. He might be fifty—a picturesque person, with silky, fair beard and wavy hair touched with grey. The little daughter was quite young, not more than seventeen or eighteen at the outside. She had a musically-toned voice, and addressed the old lady with ingratiating gentleness and a pretty smile.

Then Madame Berne came hurrying out; she was kind and hospitable, but veiled anxiety peeped from her brown eyes. She never wished to turn anyone away, least of all any English visitors; but there seemed to be suspiciously little luggage, and how about recommendations? There was a fable to which she fondly clung—that she never admitted anyone without an introduction. Her rule had many exceptions, but she could not relax it before the vigilant eyes of the chorus. She conducted the man and the girl indoors, and there, to her relief, the man drew out a purse and offered to pay a week's rent in advance. That was highly reassuring; her natural kind-heartedness might surely have paid now!

"We are not very rich," the girl remarked wistfully, "but we want to be very comfortable. He has been ill, and we are both so dreadfully tired!"

"And so you shall be comfortable, dear Mademoiselle," Madame Berne cried.

She felt for the young girl with a sick man on her hands, and for the man too! She loved girls; her own, had she lived (but the little angel died at four years old), would now have been about this girl's age.

Everything was amicably arranged after that. She conducted her guests to two pleasant rooms on the third floor, and she brought up tea to them with her own hands.

The man went to rest in his own room; the girl sank into a chair with a deep sigh of relief.

"Oh, how glad I am to have got here! to have got to a nice clean place, and to be with someone who is kind!" she cried.

She was extremely slight, and almost childish in appearance. She had flung her straw hat down on the floor, and her ungloved hands were small and brown. She was not a very tidy girl, but she was graceful, and there was something charming about her.

She had a quantity of soft light brown hair that had threads of gold in it, and that was twisted into a thick knot at the nape of her round little neck. Her complexion was pale and somewhat spoilt by freckles. Her eyes were dark, but indeterminate in colour—not brown, nor grey, nor blue. Madame Berne finally came to the conclusion that there was more dark green than anything else in them. There was a scar on her left temple, but the thick hair waved over it and nearly concealed it.

"For myself, I think it is not an unkind world—at any rate, where the young are concerned," said Madame Berne.

The girl did not endorse that opinion, though she did not contradict it.

"*You* are kind, Madame, but they were horrid to us in

Paris," she said. "My father caught influenza there. The hotel people hustled us out before he was really fit to move. He has not got it now," she added anxiously; "you need have no fears about infection. It is only that he is tired. Everyone is tired after influenza. Well, he can stay quietly here for a week anyhow!"

"I hope that you will stay many weeks," said Madame hospitably. "The English are especially welcome."

When her landlady had gone, the girl knocked at the door of the adjoining room, and, hardly waiting for permission, entered.

The man was sitting with both elbows on the table, and his head propped on his hands. He had a sheet of writing-paper spread out before him, which he seemed to be contemplating with some perplexity. He looked round with the irritable frown of weakness.

"I don't know that I want you just at present, Babette," said he.

"But you are not fit to be sitting up. Why are you writing letters now? Won't they wait till to-morrow? or why can't I write for you?" she asked.

The man ran his fingers through his beard. His eyes rested on Babette with lazy amusement and affection and some compunction.

"You do undertake all my jobs, don't you?" he remarked. "We've got into that habit, I'm afraid. All the same, you can't tackle this business, you poor Baby, for this letter is to my sister, and it is about you."

"About me! Why are you writing a letter about me?" she cried.

She was rather pleased, and also rather inquisitive on the subject.

"May I read it when it's done? I should like to know what you have written about me," she insisted.

"I've said you are an impudent little baggage, and a heavy handful for any man," he answered lightly.

"No, I won't show it to you—not to-night, anyhow. It doesn't please me. I must concoct something better, something more tactful than that."

The girl's eyes were bright with curiosity.

"But I can't think why you should want to concoct a tactful letter about *me*!" said she. "If I were an unpaid bill, now . . . And talking of unpaid bills, do you know that we've not settled. . . ."

"Oh, don't talk of them," he interrupted; "if you've nothing more amusing to discuss, run away and eat your dinner. I shan't go down to the table d'hôte. Go and make friends with all those old ladies. We might give them a concert next week, eh?"

"I shall bring some soup up to you," said Babette. "You must eat something. I shouldn't think that they could charge extra for serving you in your room if I take it up myself."

He laughed. "You are growing into a dreadful little skinflint."

Babette shook her head.

"Oh, but I should like to be extravagant," she cried almost passionately. "I'd give anything to be able to squander money without having to think twice of it! I'd give anything to be able to choose the nicest instead of just the cheapest things. I hate having to be careful! Nobody can possibly hate it more than I do. I'm not a skinflint by nature, I'm sure!"

"No, no; you're not," he agreed, and sighed. "You'd do very well for a fine lady! Poor girl! Poor girl!"

She paused yet a moment with her hand on the handle of the door. Her glance fell again on his unfinished letter.

"We are quite happy together. You—you don't really find me a heavy handful, do you?" she said wistfully. "You've been very good about it—of course I know that."

"Nonsense! Don't talk nonsense, Baby," he said almost roughly. "I've never been good in my life!

Good-night, my dear. Mind, I don't want any soup. You are not to come bothering in here again."

"Very well, I won't," she said; but her forehead puckered again into a worried frown as she went reluctantly downstairs.

She had never seen him really ill before this attack of influenza. She felt inadequate, and wished that she knew what her mother would have done under the circumstances. Still, by the time she reached the verandah where dinner was ready, she had brightened up. She was hungry and the food was good, and she made friends easily with her neighbours. Indeed, she charmed all the old ladies by her easy manners and her ready interest in her surroundings. They did not quite know where to place her in the social scale—opinions were divided on that score—but they found her most agreeable. Few people could help finding Babette agreeable.

When she had gone Mr. Rothenstein relapsed into the consideration of his letter. His thoughts resumed an uncomfortable drift. He was one of the people whose consciences haunt them fitfully, without being strong enough to take possession of the helm. He was haunted now—not, indeed, by a sense of guilt for past sins, but rather by an unaccustomed, and to him a most unpleasant and irksome, sense of responsibility. He was not a man of strong principles; he was incurably shifty over debts, and apt to consider himself aggrieved when he was obliged to pay up for the cake he had eaten some time ago. He had never surmounted an early failure that had alienated him from his father; he was the thoroughly unsatisfactory member of an otherwise honourable family—or, rather, he was hardly a "member" any longer. He went by another name, and, save that he accepted an allowance, he was part and parcel of it no longer.

Yet, though to his family he was a discreditable and miserable black sheep, to his wife he had been as a demi-god, and Babette was devoted to him. He had not

done badly by her, either. He had inculcated nice manners and gentle ways. *He genuinely loathed anything that savoured of coarseness or cruelty or vulgarity.* At first the little thing had amused him, but of late years a very real affection had grown up between them, and that, no doubt, was very much to his credit. He had not too often done his best for anyone, being morally lazy, but he considered that he had done his best for this woman-child left to his mercies. It seems to be one of the fundamental laws of life that to do one's best always leads to a disconcerting vision of a hitherto undreamt-of better. Peace does not lie that way.

"DEAR JULIE" (he wrote),

"I have no doubt you will be surprised, and perhaps you may be offended, at getting a letter from me. Probably you will have forgotten that I used to be your favourite brother in the days when we were all young; at any rate, you cannot deny that you were my favourite sister."

He paused there, and pulled his beard with a smile. "Julie was always sentimental. She'll like that," he reflected.

"I only venture to remind you of the fact, because I want to enlist your sympathies on behalf of my poor Babette. I've had a nasty illness (worse than she guesses), and I am anxious about her future. I prefer not to ask favours from my father, but the smallness of the allowance made to me has quite precluded any possibility of saving, and therefore I have nothing (except debts) to leave to the child.

"She is affectionate and quick-witted, but I doubt if she is of the kind which can successfully jostle its way through the world. To tell the truth, I do not see what is to become of her should anything happen to me; and, to write frankly, I do not care to contemplate the situation. No daughter could have behaved better to me than she has behaved . . ."

His pen came to a standstill there; he read through what he had written and shook his head.

"No; it won't do. It's not enough. I must take more trouble than that for the little thing. I suppose I must write to my father, but that will be deucedly unpleasant."

He tried to nerve his slack will to the task, but the effort wearied him.

He threw himself down on his bed; he was very tired—too tired to undress himself.

"Well, to-morrow I'll write to my father to explain everything, and ask him to befriend Babette. To-morrow without fail," he said to himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

The household of the Pension Berne kept regular hours. As a rule the old ladies retired to their rooms soon after half-past nine, and by eleven they were peacefully slumbering. They were half an hour later than usual on the night of the stranger's arrival, because Miss Rothenstein had amused them all so much.

At two in the morning they were awakened by the sound of footsteps running through the place. Babette, her face distorted with horror, rushed along the passages wildly seeking for Madame Berne. She hastily buttoned her shabby little black jacket over her nightgown—her hair fell loose on her shoulders. The house was old and rambling, and there were long, narrow passages leading from one wing to the other, and steps here and there, two or three at a time. The girl stumbled as she ran; it seemed to her as if she were in a horrible nightmare, as if she had wandered for miles, tapping at all the wrong doors, encountering strange night-capped figures, being given directions which she could not understand, till at last Madame Berne, roused by the sound of voices, met her and took her firmly by the arms.

"What is the matter? What do you do racing



through the house like one mad? Is someone ill?" she asked. She felt that the girl was shaking with horror as she held her.

"Not ill—not ill! I hoped at first that he was only ill," the poor child gasped, "but—but—he is dead, quite dead!"

## CHAPTER II

"I COULD not believe her at first! It seemed too bad to be true," poor Madame said, when telling the terrible news.

"But nothing is too bad for truth," the chorus declared pessimistically. "A report may be too good to be true, but never, never too bad."

It certainly was unlucky! A death in the house, just when the season was about to begin, when those longed-for summer visitors might be expected to arrive, that was bad enough! But such a sudden death, entailing horrors of official inquisition, that was worse!

The doctor said that Mr. Rothenstein must have been dead for at least an hour before the poor little daughter in the adjoining room discovered the fact. The girl had heard no sound of distress, but woke possessed by a sensation of cold and terror. She got up and listened at the door between their rooms, and the silence alarmed instead of reassuring her. She did not like to go in for fear of vexing him, but her apparently foolish fears increased, and at last she crept to his bedside very softly, hoping to hear him breathe. She could hear nothing, so fetched and lit a candle. He was lying on his back, still and straight, the eyelids open, and the lips parted. She put her hand to his heart, and felt that he was cold. She got brandy and tried to pour it down his throat, but it was of no use. Then horror seized her and she ran—ran to find Madame Berne.

"Because Madame Berne is kind," the girl said.

She gave her evidence in a low, even voice; she was tearless and dazed, and mechanically self-controlled.

The doctor's verdict was that Mr. Rothenstein must always have had a weak heart, that influenza had overstrained it. He had known the thing happen just so before. It was as if a rough clutch were laid on a delicate mechanism. The works stopped suddenly—probably too suddenly for pain to be felt.

"Was there anything that I might have done if I had been with him?" the girl asked.

It was her only question, and the doctor's assurance that no one could have done anything seemed to afford her the only ray of consolation.

"But the strangest part of the whole overwhelming catastrophe is that the poor dear little Mademoiselle appears to know nothing whatever about any relatives," sighed Madame. "Surely there must be someone who should be written to at once? She stares at me blankly when I ask, as if still half-stunned, 'I had only him, and now I have no one,' she says."

The funeral took place from the pension. It was dreadful to Madame to see a hearse in her cheerful courtyard. All the gay little green tea-tables had to be swept away; all the shutters were reverently shut. King Death is a visitor who must be received with downcast eyes; and, alas! he does not wait convenience, nor pay attention to times and seasons.

Madame Berne, herself arrayed in black, accompanied the girl to the grave. "For I cannot let that poor child go alone," she said.

She bought a black blouse and skirt for Miss Rothenstein, and swathed her in the long mourning veil that Frenchwomen affect.

When they got back to the pension after the funeral the girl made a pathetic appeal to Madame Berne.

"May I please be alone—quite alone, just for the rest of to-day," she begged. "I want to give to-day to—to being sorry. To-morrow I shall have to begin to think about what I must do next."

"It's all very touching—but there is something remarkably strange about the affair," the chorus agreed.

Kind Madame Berne could not sleep a wink on the night after that funeral. The most horrible fancies assailed her. What if that girl were not a "demoiselle" after all? What if she were just an adventuress—someone whom the strange Englishman had picked out of the gutter? What if she were a thief, who would make off in the morning with the hard-won contents of Madame's desk? Had she been bent on finding out the ways of the house as she ran, apparently distracted with grief, through the passages? But no! here common sense came to the rescue. Mr. Rothenstein's death could not have been part of a plot. In the morning these miserable ideas flew away. Madame was ashamed of them! They were like unclean birds desecrating a new-made grave. She would not entertain them now that she was wide awake! Yet they decided her on action. Yesterday she had yielded to her guest's entreaty to be let alone, but this morning she took hot milk and coffee to Miss Rothenstein's room with her own hands, and insisted on entering.

The girl sat by the window, ready dressed. She looked very forlorn and very colourless. Her eyes were strained and red round the rims from want of sleep; the freckles showed on her pallor; even her lips were pale. She was one of the women who are fascinating to look at one day and almost ugly the next. Grief made her ugly! Yet at that moment Madame Berne's heart went out to her! This, surely, was no adventuress—but only a most lonely and unhappy little girl!

"I have brought you some breakfast. You must eat and drink or you, too, will be ill," said Madame.

"I am feeling very sick—perhaps I am about to die, too!" said the girl.

But, though she spoke with listless resignation, her nostrils quivered when the good smell of hot coffee

reached them. She had fasted for a long while ; all at once she realized that she was certainly hungry !

She drank the coffee and ate the bread. A faint tinge of colour came back to her cheek.

Madame Berne flung back the wooden shutters ; the sun-filled air streamed into the room, and the girl raised her head.

"After all, I don't wish to die ! Death is very dreadful !" she said shuddering. Then, for the first time since her bereavement, she began to cry.

"He loved the sunshine in France," she sobbed. "Even when we were footsore and tired he loved it ; and now he is shut away all by himself in the dark and cold."

Madame Berne put both arms round her, and tried to comfort her with motherly tenderness and religious platitudes.

The latter she herself felt doubtful about. She had gathered that her late visitor was a heretic, and really, under those circumstances, it was difficult to know what to say. One could not speak with certainty, and the benefit of the doubt gives but cold consolation. Fortunately, her instinctive faith was stronger than her theoretical religion.

"The good God will take care of him, my dear," she said.

"But *I* always did that," the girl cried, as if the exchange of guardianship hardly reassured her.

She was the better for having wept and eaten. She bathed her eyes, and gave Madame a flickering smile.

"We have given you a great deal of trouble !" she said. "No, certainly I must not die ! I do not know who would pay for my funeral !"

Perhaps she meant to give her hostess an opening for a business talk ; anyhow, the good woman took it.

"I have to confess something to you," she said. "On the day after your poor father died, you will remember that we tried to get you to answer some questions, but you were so overcome by the suddenness

of the event that it was difficult to get answers from you. Acting on the advice of the doctor and the notary (being of opinion that something must be done at once), I therefore took it upon myself to telegraph and to write a letter in order that your relatives might be acquainted with what had occurred."

The girl looked surprised, then perplexed.

"My relatives? I have none!" she said. "Who in the world could you have written to?"

"You do not suppose that you have been living on air!" Madame remarked succinctly. "Your poor father had means of his own; is it not so?"

"He was a musician. He sometimes gave recitals, and sometimes he taught—but he hated teaching," said the girl. "There was also a sum of money that came to us half-yearly. We were always glad when it came, though" (with a sigh) "it was often swallowed up in advance. He received it just the day before we got here. That was why we. . . ." She paused and blushed. It was evident that that was why they had been able to pay a week in advance.

"Just so," said Madame Berne. "Mr. Rothenstein's remittances came to him through an English banker. You must forgive me, but you would tell us so little that I was forced to search for any clue. On finding the address of his banker I telegraphed, informing him of the situation, and also wrote by the first post asking him if he could put me in communication with your relations. The banker replied that he would at once acquaint Mr. Rothenstein's father with the sad news. I now anxiously await a letter from your grandfather." She looked anxiously at the girl. "I beg you to be open with me. Why did you tell me that you had no one belonging to you in the world?"

"Why, I know nothing whatever of his father," the girl replied. "My mother was poor—not a lady at all; she is dead now. She died when I was thirteen. I believe that *her* father was a gamekeeper, but I am not sure about it. He died years ago, before I was born.

Of course, he would have been my grandfather, but as to——”

A tapping at the door interrupted them.

“Oh, I don’t want to have to see anyone yet,” the girl cried. “May I not be alone this one day more?”

That short space of time, that one day’s grace, seemed to separate her like a frail defence from an invading army of difficulties. It was a defence that must of necessity soon be destroyed; it was melting away with every minute that passed, but Madame was full of pity; she had not the heart to ruthlessly sweep it aside.

“What do you want? Mademoiselle must not be disturbed to-day,” she said, going out and shutting the door behind her. A *femme-de-chambre* stood in the passage, and behind her was an elderly lady, quite unmistakably an English lady!—how well Madame Berne knew and respected the type!—a lady in a well-fitting travelling costume, in a tailor-made long grey coat, and a hat trimmed with a grey veil. Her soft grey hair was becomingly waved over a cushion; though not in the least pretending to youth, she was good to look at, and her dark eyes were as bright as any girl’s with eager interest and excitement.

“I could not wait downstairs!” said the lady. “You are Madame Berne, are you not? I feel we owe you a debt of gratitude for your care of my niece. Where is she?”

“Your niece! You have come to fetch her! À la bonne heure!” cried Madame Berne.

She was so much relieved that her voice actually choked with emotion. What had she been so much afraid of? That there really were no relatives? That some awful responsibility would be thrust on her? That her kind heart and her common-sense would have a painful fight? That she would have to confess to the Greek chorus that she had been once again taken in? That the poor little girl who had begged for “one more day’s grace” would have to be turned out eventually?

No, no! She would not so much as allow to herself now that she feared any of these things.

"Naturally, I was quite certain that someone would soon arrive," she said, "but I rejoice indeed to see you. The shock to the poor young lady has been so terrible, her nerves have been so entirely upset, that she appears to have forgotten that she has a kind aunt and grandfather."

"Forgotten! But she does not know us! She has never set eyes on us," said the lady. "There was the saddest family quarrel. We knew absolutely nothing of my brother's affairs. My father, Sir Hubert Redstone, is abroad; he was in Italy when your telegram arrived. His banker, of course, forwarded it to him; but when Mr. Barton got your letter he brought it to *me*, seeing that I was the only member of the family in London. Ah! I cannot describe to you how I felt when I read it, when I learnt from you that my poor brother's little daughter was here, an orphan among strangers. 'I will not waste a moment—I must go to the poor child, to my own little niece, at once,' I said. For I am like that—I never hesitate. I am longing to comfort her. I will wait here while you prepare her, but do not be long, dear Madame."

"Good news needs little preparation," cried Madame triumphantly. "I will be but a moment."

She went back to her charge, flushed with pleasure; she seized the girl's hands in her warm grasp.

"My dear young lady! All is perfectly as it should be!" she cried. "Your aunt waits to embrace you! She has come like a good angel! Without doubt your troubles are now over! Ah, pardon me"—as the girl looked at her reproachfully—"I did not mean that! But at least you will have the consolation of weeping for your father in your dear aunt's arms. Your anxieties at least are finished!"

The girl stood up and looked with a dubiously startled expression at the stranger, who now advanced impetuously into the room, holding out both her hands.



"But I—I do not know this lady," she said.

"Dearest child, of course you do not! That is part of the sadness of it all. You do not know any of us. That is where we have all been so wrong—so miserably wrong," cried the new-comer. "Ah, when I learnt that my poor brother lay dead, that we could never, never make it up with him, but that *you* were here, fatherless and motherless, you poor child, I cried out aloud: "Nothing—nothing on earth shall keep me from his daughter!"

She was more emotional than English women usually are—more dramatic. It is possible she enjoyed a scene, but there was real feeling in her heart all the same, and there were real tears in her eyes and in her voice.

The girl looked up as if she would have liked to have responded, but hesitated.

"But—you do not understand," she said. "If you understood you would not want me. My mother—yes, it is quite true she was his wife—but——"

"Hush, hush! Never mind all that!" cried the lady. She waived "all that" aside with a quick, impulsive gesture. "We have allowed miseries and bitterness to come between us too much; but now our only wish is to welcome and love his child, his little daughter."

"Ah, yes! he often called me 'little daughter,'" said the girl.

A quiver of emotion crossed her face. It seemed to cost her an effort to speak again. "Wait! wait! If you are his sister, there is something here which is yours, which he wrote before he died. I've just remembered it. It is about me; it will explain."

She went across the room, took an unfinished letter from a drawer, and thrust it into the lady's hands. Miss Redstone read it with swimming eyes.

"Ah, yes! Indeed he was my favourite! Poor, poor, dear Stephen!" she cried. "Babette! So your name is Babette! But what a dear little name!"

"I was christened Barbara, after mother," said the girl in a low, tense voice; "Babette was only his name

for me. I have not seen his letter, Madame; no doubt he tells you——”

“He bids me care for you. He says you were the best little daughter in the world. You poor, poor darling! But I came to you even without bidding,” Miss Redstone cried, and folded the girl in her arms.

Madame, overcome with enjoyable emotion, discreetly retired at this juncture of affairs, and left the “good angel” in possession.

She went down presently into the courtyard, where all the old ladies were sitting, eagerly expectant. She wiped her eyes quite openly. Yesterday she had endeavoured to disguise the nature and extent of her anxieties; now she did not care who saw that she had been crying.

“Miss Redstone, the poor gentleman’s sister, has arrived!” she announced. “The poor, dear little one weeps now in her aunt’s arms! It was a moving scene. I own I was touched. Yes, the poor gentleman was ‘Redstone,’ not ‘Rothenstein.’ There was a miserable family quarrel, and he chose to disguise himself under another name. Our dear little lady is also Miss Redstone—Miss Barbara Redstone. I have been having a little conversation with Miss Redstone’s maid. The best rooms in the house will be required at once. The aunt will remain here a few days in order to settle all that has to be arranged. She will, no doubt, wish to see the grave, and to speak to the guardian of the cemetery about a marble cross. It appears that they are rich people, well known in London society, and extremely *comme il faut*; but I knew *that* at a glance!”

“But little Mademoiselle and her father were not rich,” observed one of the old ladies; “she counted her pennies very anxiously, and her blouse was mended in three places.”

“I think she will wear darned clothes no more,” said Madame Berne. She smiled and then sighed. “Ah, mon Dieu! how charming not to have to count the pence! Poverty is an *éxigeant* companion; for

my part, I am glad that Mademoiselle is well quit of her!"

"It is better to be virtuous than to be rich," said one of the chorus, but she spoke half-heartedly.

"It is possible to be both!" averred Madame Berne stoutly, "though," she added, with momentary ruefulness, "I have never myself been in such a happy position."

"Tch—tch!" murmured the old ladies. They thought that Madame Berne talked too much of money, that she was very *bourgeoise* at times.

### CHAPTER III

It was early, not yet six in the morning, when Babette stole out of the Pension Berne and walked quickly up the steep old street of the town. She glanced behind her once or twice as she hurried along, for she had somewhat the sensation of escape—escape from a wonderfully kind and vigilant gaoler.

Miss Redstone surrounded her with care and tenderness. The girl regarded this newly-discovered and enthusiastically devoted relative with a curious mixture of surprise, appreciation, and incipient amusement. She caught herself constantly wondering what *he* would have said to the situation, constantly treasuring little humorous points that would have made him smile could she have told him about them. Then with a sharp prick the truth would pierce her; she would never make him smile again—never, never!

But how hard it all was to realize! Babette felt at last that she must have a few hours alone. There was much to be thought of, and she had been swept along with no time to think. There were questions to be decided, and somehow she had been cheated into feeling as if the decision were made for her. When she got away from the town and into the quiet forest for which she was making, she would look everything fairly in the face; she would see where she stood, and what she meant to do.

She walked fast, being anxious to get clear of the houses. She crossed the trim Palace gardens, and entered the first long straight alley of trees. He used to say that a French forest wasn't a patch on an

English forest. It was too tidy; it had no mystery; you saw your way miles ahead. He hated seeing what was coming. But Babette loved France. She had been sent to school for a few years after her mother's death, and during every single day of her school-life she had set her heart and her will determinedly on being his companion when she "got out." She had looked forward to getting out as if she had been in prison, and how happy she had been when they first started together! A half-terrified happiness, for at first she was dreadfully afraid of not suiting or pleasing and of being left behind. Later on they had become excellent comrades. What miles and miles they had walked, carrying his violin with them! He had been rather irritable at times, especially latterly, and now she recognized sadly that he must have been far more ailing than she had guessed. That last long tramp they had taken through the forest of Fontainebleau had been too much for him. It had dimly dawned on her at the time that she must manage so that he should never walk quite so far again. Babette was a born little "manager," as he had sometimes laughingly told her. Ah, but she would never manage for him any more! Those days were dead—dead—dead!

Sobs rose in her throat, and a gust of sudden grief shook her. The good smell of moss and earth, the poignant fragrance of lilies of the valley (a fragrance which she had once loved, but which now reminded of a grave, for kind Madame Berne had laid lilies on the coffin) combined to upset her composure. She fought against rising tears for a minute; then, with a hasty glance round to make sure that she was alone, she sat down on the spreading roots of a beech-tree, and, bowing her head on her knees, cried and cried with an abandonment that did her good.

The man she wept for would have certainly said that he was hardly worth so many tears as that! Yet never was grief purer or more unalloyed. There was neither bitterness nor passion in it, but simple primitive sorrow

over the parting of the ways, over that which had gone, and which could return no more.

The cemetery lay below, and she hated the thought of it! The free and beautiful forest stretched before her, and the sound of the whispering leaves, the soft stir of tiny joyful lives all played a part in her regret. He didn't see, he didn't hear, he didn't smell the spring-tide now! Alas, alas!

"I want you back, I want you back!" Babette gasped between her sobs; but when she had wept her fill she felt relieved, and, looking up to see the sky very blue between the fresh tender green of the young leaves, she was conscious that, despite her true mourning, she was glad that she herself was still alive and above ground!

"And now you must really decide," she said aloud to herself. "You've cried enough, Babette, and now you must decide."

She had a funny trick of talking to herself—a trick which had survived a childhood during which she had frequently had no one else to talk to. But before she reached decision a sound startled her.

A man had come up behind her through the trees. He had cut across to the path through the underwood, and his footsteps had made little sound on the soft, moist earth.

She turned round to find him regarding her with a mixture of sympathy and embarrassment. Tears alarmed, but Babette attracted him.

"I—I am most awfully sorry for you, you know," he said at last.

He was not a stranger, and yet at the first moment of his greeting Babette could not remember where she had met him before. She had met so many hundreds of people during her wandering life, and she had always easily reached a certain stage of comradeship.

"You don't mean to say you have forgotten me! I say, you do forget quickly, Miss Rothenstein," the young man cried reproachfully. "We were quite

chummy this time last year. We went for walks together, and your father gave me lessons in playing the flute. You used to chaff me no end about it, and call me 'the gentle shepherd' because he taught me under the trees."

"Oh, of course! I know now. You are Mr. Graham!" Babette cried. For a moment the world seemed to swirl before her. Trees, blue sky, and Mr. Graham's figure were all misty. Then she tried to smile at him, but she wished acutely that he had not come just then. He made those summer days of last year so alive again. They had not been filled with unmixed joy in the living, for she had been much worried over unpaid bills; but they were dear to her heart as she looked back.

"I suppose I ought not to have disturbed you," the young man said; "I suppose I had better go."

But he spoke ruefully; it was evident that he wished to stay.

He was a tall, slim young man, who only just missed being very good-looking. His brown eyes were marred by their short-sighted look, but they brimmed over with sympathy, and at the present moment with something warmer still. He had always admired Babette, but last year she had been still almost a child, and to-day she was a woman. His mouth (it was a weak mouth) was hidden by a soft brown moustache. He possessed attractive qualities, and he and Babette had certainly been good playfellows. Youth calls to youth all the world over!

"I've thought of you so much, though you hardly recollected me," he went on. "I must apologize for bothering you. I'm just off. But the fact is I was so immensely interested when I heard the news about you. It's sad news, too," he added quickly; "I liked your father so much."

Babette looked at him kindly then, and her green eyes softened.

"Oh *thank* you" she said—"thank you for liking

him. I am glad you did. I am glad you miss him, and are sorry."

Her mood changed. She patted the mossy, spreading roots at her side invitingly. Though she had not put the feeling into words even to herself, yet the fact that her late companion had been paid but scanty tribute of mourning had increased the lonely quality of her sorrow. Even his newly-discovered sister was not overwhelmingly sad. Mr. Graham had said exactly the right thing.

She no longer wished that he would go away and leave her alone; since he, too, was sorry, he might stay.

"It is not nearly breakfast-time yet. Won't you sit down and rest?" she said. "I came out to be alone and to think; but after all, I hate thinking, and I hate being alone, too." Her smile, more pathetic than she knew, glanced out like a gleam of sunshine between rain-clouds. "What a funny chance that we should meet here!"

Frank Graham threw himself down by her side. "No, it's not chance," he owned. "The fact is, I watched you go out of the pension from my window; I saw in which direction you went, and I followed."

"But it is an odd coincidence that you should be in Compiègne," she persisted.

"It's not coincidence, for you brought me here. I knew that I should find you."

Babette stared at him with unfeigned surprise.

"It happened in this way," said he. "My mother and I live in Melbury Road, in London. You've heard me speak of my mother? But perhaps"—with a return of boyish pique—"you've forgotten that, too. Well, the Redstones live quite close to us. Mrs. Durnham (she is Miss Redstone's married sister) is my godmother. Siegfried Redstone and I were first at Harrow and then at Cambridge together. Sir Hubert always gave me, as well as Siegfried, tips when I was a boy. The Redstones are like near relations, though of course there isn't any blood tie between us. I've known them ever



since I was born ; but (till just the other day) I never, never dreamt of connecting them in my mind with Mr. Rothenstein or you."

"Well, you wouldn't naturally!" said Babette.

"One morning (the mater and I had hardly done breakfast) in came Miss Redstone in the most tremendous state of excitement. She had heard from Sir Hubert's banker of her brother's death, and that he had left a daughter. She was starting off immediately. Sir Hubert was in Spain ; there was no time to consult with him—at any rate, she wouldn't wait. She said she came for advice, but what she really wanted was that my mother should lend her her maid. You see, Célestine is a most excellent traveller, but Miss Redstone's own maid is English, and is of no use abroad. Mrs. Durnham had taken hers to Scotland with her. Old Julie can be a bit cool—oh, I beg your pardon! I forgot!"

"Never mind! Go on—she has not been my aunt long!" said Babette.

Her face rippled and dimpled with amusement. She had been sad enough five minutes ago, *was* sad still in some undercurrent of feeling, but for the life of her she could not help seeing the comic side of things.

"It's all so funny! You see, I have never before had to do with people who lend each other maids!" she remarked.

"I sent off a telegram for her addressed to : Miss Redstone, Chez Madame Berne, 7, Rue Alm," continued Frank, "and I offered to see her through the Customs, for I was just starting for a walking-tour in France. I still didn't connect the story with you."

"It was no wonder I never got the telegram, considering the name and address were both wrong!"

"That was just like her! She is always hopelessly incorrect about details, though in her own way she is cleverish. Well, we crossed together, and on board the steamer she told me a great deal—she always does talk, you know! She told me how her brother had

quarrelled with Sir Hubert years and years ago ; how he had been quite cut off, and had even gone about under another name ; how she had only just heard of her niece's existence. When she said ' He called himself Rothenstein,' why, then the truth dawned on me."

"What truth?" asked Babette.

"Why, that I already knew you ! That the dear, delightful little friend whose company I enjoyed in the spring of last year was actually the newly-discovered grandchild of Sir Hubert ! I was pleased ! I can't tell you how pleased I was !—though, of course," bethinking himself, "I was grieved too."

"Oh, yes!" said Babette, with a queer, doubtful little smile.

Frank Graham reddened, for he was not a dense youth.

"I *am* sorry too!" he repeated. "But just at the first moment I own I could only think how awfully nice it was that we should meet again, and, more than that, that you should be coming to live quite near us, and I should be your old friend, ready to welcome you to the new life."

"That was very good of you," said Babette.

It crossed her mind that, though he was so pleased and excited now, though he had been thinking so much of her lately, yet he never would have made the least effort to see her again had not this odd turn of Fortune's wheel flung the opportunity into his hands. Yet she did not resent the fact ! She had known quite well that, though they played together one summer, yet she and Frank Graham really belonged to different strata of society ; she had not expected that it should be otherwise.

"When I realized that I should find you here I insisted on escorting Miss Redstone all the way," he went on. "She did not encourage me. She said you would be overwhelmed with sorrow, and that she had better be alone with you, for her heart would tell her how to comfort you. I had to swear that I wouldn't spoil the first meeting."

"Miss Redstone is a most kind lady," Babette said sedately.

Then they looked at each other; a wave of comradeship flowed from one to the other, and they simultaneously laughed.

"But I don't know why I laugh! I feel more like crying in reality," Babette said.

"I laugh because it is so extraordinary, and such luck—such jolly good luck, that the Redstone grandchild should turn out to be—just you," cried Frank.

"Ah! but—but supposing it isn't so, after all? I don't believe in luck!" said Babette.

She dug the toe of her shabby little walking-shoe into the soft ground, and disturbed a whole colony of fierce red ants. She did not look up at Frank; she seemed absorbed in watching their angry perturbation. She had turned rather pink as she spoke.

"I don't wonder you feel like that. It must seem exactly like a kind of fairy-story with yourself as heroine!" the young man cried sympathetically. He rather prided himself on his quick understanding. "I don't wonder in the least that you are bewildered! How it must all have burst on you! First the tragedy of your father's death, and then Miss Redstone's arriving at the critical moment. I say, she does love a scene, doesn't she? How she must have enjoyed herself!"

Babette still apparently gave her attention to the havoc she had wrought among the ants. Her silence seemed a reproof.

"I ought not to laugh at her. I keep forgetting that." Frank cried. "Are you offended with me—Babette?"

He had called her by her Christian name last year in the forest. She had been scarcely grown-up then, but he ventured on it doubtfully now. Would she object?

"Yes—no! Oh, what does it matter what you say?" the girl cried impatiently. "I wasn't thinking about that! There is so much to decide. I came up here to try to face it all, and to make up my own mind; but how can I, when I don't get one undisturbed moment?"

"I beg your pardon. I'll leave you in peace," said Frank, and even as he spoke down came a heavy plump of rain, the first slow drops of a thunderstorm.

"Stop, stop! We had better both wait till this is over," cried Babette.

The thunder boomed sullenly, and she shivered. A thunderstorm always made her physically uneasy. It set her nerves on edge, and sent tremors through her. She did not want to be left alone in it. She looked up at him deprecatingly.

"I believe I was rather cross, but I was just going to tell you something when—— *Oh!*"

The lightning flashed, cutting her sentence short.

"There's a woodman's hut a few yards off—we'll run for that. Come along! Give me your hand," said he.

They ran together hand-in-hand, he helping her along, though, indeed, she was not much of a drag on him, for she was lightly built and active as a squirrel. He was laughing and flushed when they reached the shelter just in time, and the storm broke in good earnest. They watched it from the door of the hut. He played the protector very nicely, and Babette tried to conceal her terror. It was sharp, but passed quickly, and when it was over, they went down the hill and across the park together, talking and laughing like two children.

The air was so fresh and the clouds had rolled off, and somehow that scamper through the wet forest had changed their mood—they had resumed the good, unsentimental comradeship of last year.

It was only when they were in the street again and close to the Pension Berne that he remembered that he had felt rather huffy during moments of their converse.

"I am afraid that you haven't had time to make up your mind, after all. I am sorry for that, since you wanted to so much," he said. "And, by-the-by, what were you about to tell me when the storm interrupted?"

"Oh—well—I don't know that I am sorry! I can't possibly tell you anything now, anyhow," she said.

## CHAPTER IV

"I have seen that poverty makes me do unfit things ; . . . that hour wherein I would repent me to be honest, there were ways enough open for me to be rich."—BEN JONSON.

"CARA mia ! what a storm you have been out in. I have been so anxious for you. Let me pull off that wet coat. Why ! I must own that you look the better for your run. The wind has actually kissed a shade of colour into your cheeks. But why did you go out so early, dear little niece ? You ought at least to have had some coffee first—you are not strong enough to walk fasting."

The words fell pleasantly on Babette's ears as she entered Miss Redstone's sitting-room. Girls who have been surrounded with care all their lives are apt to jib at too much protection, but Babette had never been too well cared for. It seemed to her oddly agreeable, albeit a trifle comical, that she should be made of such importance.

Her eyes rested appreciatively on the picturesque elderly lady. How nice Miss Redstone looked, although so old ! Quite fifty—and to seventeen fifty is old indeed. One might be proud of an aunt like that. Babette liked the way Miss Redstone's pretty grey hair was waved and dressed ; she liked the well-cut, suitable travelling dress, and the slender beringed hands, and the air of prosperity about her. Furthermore—for she was very observant, and had seen many sorts and conditions of people—she liked her manner to her maid, and her refined accent.

"We will have our *petit déjeuner* here by the window—rolls and coffee and honey, and a dish of wild strawberries. You like sweet things, I notice, dear little one! I waited for you! Now we will have it at once. Célestine, take away Miss Barbara's wet jacket, please, and bring her a pair of slippers, and set that table in the window."

"I never dreamt that you waited breakfast for me, Madame. If I had guessed that you would wait I should not have gone out," said the girl.

"But you must not call me 'Madame'; you must call me Aunt Julie," said Miss Redstone eagerly.

Babette murmured something that sounded more like gentle depreciation than assent as they sat down opposite each other to a cosy little breakfast.

The child was shy, Miss Redstone decided; but what a good fault that was! She might, on the contrary, have been aggressively independent, or even resentful, of these new relatives, who had never troubled their heads about her till now. Miss Redstone had gathered that Babette's mother had come from the labouring classes. How far more sympathetic than the lower middle the good lady reflected! This little thing was neither pretentious nor awkward, and surely—yes, surely, there was a discernible resemblance to that poor black sheep to whom Miss Redstone was retrospectively softening.

"Your way of eating fruit reminds me of my poor brother!" she exclaimed suddenly. "I should know that you were his child anywhere."

"Ah, Madame, that is because he was very particular about such things as eating and speaking," said Babette glancing up with a smile and a blush. "When I was younger he used to be angry and very impatient with me if I used my knife and fork in the wrong way or spoke badly. He would say: 'I'll have no more to do with you if you turn into a little pig, Baby! In that case you may trot off by yourself.' I assure you I was sometimes terribly afraid that he really would leave

me behind—all alone. That made me careful and watchful."

Miss Redstone was rather shocked.

"But, my dear, how dreadful that you should have had such unchildlike fears! As if any father would really leave his little girl behind!"

"Fathers are not always so good, though," said Babette sagely. "You know, I think, that he was quite exceptionally kind to me. I shall never forget it—never!"

Miss Redstone was so much taken aback by this curious expression of filial gratitude, with its implication of a low standard of belief in fathers in general, that the flow of her words was momentarily checked, and their conversation was further interrupted by Célestine, who brought in two letters for Mademoiselle. Célestine's narrow black eyes observed the young lady with lively interest and curiosity. Everyone in the house was more or less interested and inquisitive, and Célestine liked to be a fountain of information. She was a smart and clever travelling-maid, a treasure in an hotel and a really excellent linguist. Her ladies always had their boxes packed without a fuss on departure and their clothes ready to don on arrival; but no one soul can possess all the virtues. Célestine was more adaptable and agreeable than even the best kind of English lady's maid can be—but she was not nearly so loyal.

Babette turned the envelopes over in her hands. Both came from England, but one was directed in firm, rather beautifully-formed characters, the other was badly addressed, Compiègne being wrongly spelt and the writing illiterate.

"I don't much like letters!" she remarked.

"Dear child! How funny of you!" cried Miss Redstone. "Why, nearly all women love getting them! But you stare at your correspondence as if it might possibly bite you!"

Babette opened and read:

" 10, FRIDAY STREET,  
"BERMONDSEY.

" MY DEAR BARBARA ANNE COLE,

I take on myself to rite a few lines to you 'aving seen in the paper that your pore step Papa is dead. The sheet in wich I saw the news was lieing on the couch of a lady in her droring room where I was waiting to fit on her lining. It come on me as a great surprise, and I've kep' on thinking of you since till I felt as I must inquire what you are meaning to do now?"

When she had read so far Babette raised her eyes and looked at Miss Redstone. She dimly remembered Friday Street, and she hated the remembrance! Yet Friday Street seemed to claim her. It was there she belonged!—there! not to the life which Miss Redstone stood for.

"Seeing I was your mother's best friend I therefore rite to say that if you 'ave no better prospects in view you are welcome to come to me and see if you can turn your 'and to the dressmaking business. You always was an 'andy child as I remember and uncommon sharp. I could manage to make up another bed, and it wouldn't be the first time you slept 'ere. I 'ope your pore step-Papa 'as left you money to take you 'ome, and I 'ope there is more besides, but knowin' something of his sex and 'avin' therefore no opinion of it, I don't pin faith on his leavings. On the other 'and you must 'ave picked up stylishness in France and also some genteel connections, and if you 'ave made plans for governessing or playing on the pianner or such like, I should not wish to go against your good, but would not object to boarding you in any case, as I should do it cheaper than you would get done for anywhere else as respectable.

"Your pore mother's affectionate friend and 'oping to be yours,

"MARY ANN TAVEY."

"Shouldn't I loathe it? I won't! I won't," the girl cried to herself, and with such vehemence that she felt



as if her companion must have heard her thought, and glanced at her again, this time almost apprehensively. But no, Miss Redstone was sipping her coffee quite placidly, and with a shudder Babette turned to her other letter.

"DEAR GRANDDAUGHTER,

"My daughter will be with you when this letter reaches you, and she will be able to assure you of the welcome that awaits you in England. I am getting an old man, old enough to desire to bury bitterness, and to make friends with my unknown grandchild before I die. I should wish you to make your home with us until that time comes, or until you marry.

"Your affectionate grandfather,

"HUBERT REDSTONE."

"This is from—his father," said Babette slowly. "He means to be very kind to me, I think. Would you like to read it, Madame?"

She held out the letter hesitatingly, and Miss Redstone read it.

"The dear man! but you know he isn't really old—not to call old," she cried. "You'll love him, won't you, little Babette? Oh yes, you'll be quite the apple of his eye, I foresee."

Babette glanced from one letter to the other; she turned quite pink, and then white.

"Dear little thing! How you flush and pale! You are much too sensitive. Just like me!" cried Miss Redstone.

"No, I am not very sensitive, and I do not think I am very like you!" the girl said suddenly, and almost harshly. "I don't even think I am much like what you fancy me to be. You see, I've knocked about a good deal, and sometimes I've had to do rather shady kinds of things. There often wasn't enough money to pay bills, and I had to try to persuade people to be content and to let us off. It isn't very nice to have to coax people one does not really like. It makes one

feel mean. *He* couldn't be worried; he was getting ill, and——"

"Ah, my heart bleeds for you, you poor child! But that is all over! Put it all away from you! I quite understand what you feel, but you must leave these sorrowful anxieties behind," said the good lady.

"But you don't understand—quite," said Babette. "I should like to put it all behind me as you say! It would be—heavenly. I should like—but, oh, shouldn't I just like!—to have a rich grandfather, and a comfortable home, and never to have to bother my head again over unpaid bills. I should love to live like a lady, and to learn all kinds of nice ways. I should love—oh, better than all the rest I should love to belong to *his* people—but *I don't!*"

Her young voice sounded quite harsh and strained; Miss Redstone, who revelled in emotion up to a certain point, but didn't like it when it became ugly, shook her finger in playful admonition.

"Do not talk nonsense, you silly, dear little thing! I cannot allow that! Of course, you belong entirely to us! Why, the moment that I first saw you my heart went out to you. 'That dear child is akin to me; she is my own flesh and blood,' I said to myself. If I had met you in a crowd it would have been just the same—my instinct would have told me that you were my niece. You remember how I embraced you!"

"Yes, indeed I do," Babette answered. A gleam of laughter flickered in her eyes; she had a strong sense of humour, though it had been thrust into abeyance by late events. "But do you think your instinct is always to be trusted?" she asked.

"It never fails me!" replied Miss Redstone fervently.

"Have you never been cheated, Madame?" Babette persisted.

The good lady was taken aback.

"Oh, I do not quite say that, my dear, for, of course, there are wicked, ungrateful people in the world who would cheat an angel from heaven!" She frowned

slightly, remembering a case in which she had certainly been befooled only a few months ago. "However, I am glad to say that the creature was caught, and is in prison for it now," she added.

Babette, who was quick-witted, jumped to an apprehension of the remark, and her mobile young face bore a momentarily harder expression.

Miss Redstone would have been surprised indeed could she have read the girl's thoughts.

"You dangle a purse, and when the creature snatches you are glad it is put in prison," was what Babette was saying to herself, and somehow the reflection decided her. Logically it should have decided her the other way, but a little Devil entered into her—a naughty, defiant, and withal luxurious little Devil, who appreciated the flesh-pots greedily, and meant to grab at them.

"I shall write to my—grandfather this morning. You will advise me what to say to please him, will you not?" she said, and then the imp stretched his dirty fingers towards something that was not in itself dirty, but that had been clean and true; "I can't help it! I do like to belong to *his* people," Babette cried wistfully.

"But of course you do, you dear little niece, and we will consult together over your letter," Miss Redstone cried with real delight, for she loved giving advice, as indeed we most of us do.

So the scales that Babette had held in a trembling, uncertain hand went down at last, weighed by all sorts of grey and speckled motives! Her conscience did indeed try to protest, but, having decided, she snubbed any further remarks that it might wish to make. It was not a very insistent or loud-voiced mentor.

Two days later Miss Redstone, Babette, and the French maid departed, and the whole household assembled in the courtyard to make pretty parting speeches and to wave farewells. Everyone was sorry to see the last of the English family. They had provided a delightful excitement; for many and many a

month to come the episode of Babette would be a topic of conversation. Why, it was a novel in itself!

"Ah! it is we who see life here," the chorus averred, and perhaps they were right, for in order to see well one must sit apart a little and knit in the shade! The people who are dashing about in the sunshine, with the blood pulsing in their veins, and the dazzle of light in their eyes, are enjoying, or perhaps suffering, but they are not *seeing* life.

The darned blouse was given away to the child of the concierge, and Babette left in becoming and new mourning.

She took a prettily gracious farewell of all the old ladies, but she kissed Madame Berne.

"You are the kindest woman I've ever met," she cried, "and I've met lots, you know! I believe you would still have been kind even if no one had ever turned up to claim me!"

"I hope that I should," said Madame Berne, "but yet I am certainly truly thankful that the good lady your aunt has what you called 'turned up.' It is sad, and it is also dangerous, for pretty young ladies to drift about the world alone. There were hours when I prayed very earnestly that someone should arrive to take care of you."

"Oh, did you?" cried Babette. A very queer look came into her face. "To whom did you pray, dear Madame?"

"But — naturally I prayed to the blessed mother of our Lord," said Madame Berne, who was slightly shocked. "I know that you are not of our Church, but I hope, nevertheless, that you also always say your prayers. You see now the advantage of the habit, for someone did arrive!"

"Oh yes, she certainly did!" Babette agreed, but with a mischievous and disconcerting twinkle in her eyes.

Some qualm disturbed Madame Berne's kind and charitable mind.

"I hope that you will be good and safe and happy. I shall always remember you, my dear," she said simply.

"I am not very good, but I quite expect I shall be happy," said Babette. She gave Madame Berne another kiss. "Yes, do please remember me, and if you will say prayers about me—well, in that case I should think Our Lady *would* be the best to go to. You see, anyhow, she is a woman, so she would understand how it all happened!" with which enigmatical speech she left.

## CHAPTER V

COMPIÈGNE has a local paper of its own, and to Madame Berne's apparent deprecation, but secret pride, a highly coloured account of the events that had lately taken place in her house presently appeared in it. She rather suspected that one of the old ladies had penned it, but not one of them owned to the authorship, though they all bought copies of *Le Journal d'Aujourd'hui*, and seemed to derive immense excitement and satisfaction from it. The Redstone episode was by far the most thrilling that had ever occurred in La Maison Berne.

The arrival of another English lady, on the day that saw the departure of Babette and her aunt, hardly awoke the usual amount of comment.

Miss Dupins came with unimpeachable introductions, was rather distinguished in appearance, and was head of a well-known college for the higher education of women. At any other time she would have been a source of some covert criticism and of much interest, but the chorus was jaded with sensation. Miss Dupins, gentle, dignified, and almost middle-aged, seemed dull indeed after Babette.

Madame Berne could not refrain from recounting the whole story to her new guest when she escorted the latter to her room.

Miss Dupins was no gossip, and no great talker, but she allowed that she was acquainted with Sir Hubert Redstone, not only by name, but personally. Indeed, she had known him for a good many years. Sir Hubert had endowed a musical scholarship held by the Lady Jane Grey College, and he was on the committee of management.

"He is a distinguished man, and a very generous man, too. His newly-found grand-daughter is to be congratulated," she said.

She spoke with a certain gentle decisiveness that bespoke the schoolmistress, and she did not encourage Madame Berne to pursue the subject. In a quiet way Miss Dupins was quite unconsciously somewhat alarming in manner, but she was not arrogant at heart. On the contrary, just at present she was heart-sick, and morally and mentally so sore that she shrank nervously from even friendly contact with anyone she knew. She was thankful she had missed encountering Miss Redstone. She felt that she could not bear to meet any of the London friends who would talk to her about her beloved college. Here at least she had fancied she would be safely out of the way.

"Discreet, but cold and very proud," Madame Berne said to herself. "Very different from that dear little Mademoiselle Babette;" and she retreated with a sigh. She also felt sadly flat. It was odd how they all missed the girl's youth and vitality.

It was just tea-time again, just the hour at which Babette and Mr. Rothenstein had first come into the courtyard, when another stranger asked to see Madame Berne.

He sent in his card, and was shown into Madame's parlour, where she presently found him with a copy of *Le Journal d'Aujourd'hui* in his hand.

He was a strongly-built, shortish man, with bronzed face and square shoulders. His hair and his short, pointed beard were grizzled, but showed signs of having once been reddish in colour. His face was rugged, and deep furrows ran from the base of the nose to the corners of the mouth. It was not a good-tempered mouth, and the red-brown eyes looked as if they would easily flash with impatience, but they had yet a shrewd and not unkindly twinkle in them that was reassuring.

He was dressed in rough, comfortable clothes. He

did not appear to be a gentleman, but he possessed a certain directness of manner that was not displeasing.

"Madame Berne, I believe? Can you understand English, ma'am?" he asked.

"But certainly, Monsieur. I both understand and speak your noble language with entire correctness and proficiency," replied Madame Berne proudly.

"Good! That's a bit more than I dare say for myself," said he, and smiled. (In common with many quick-tempered people, he had a particularly bright and charming smile.)

"Since you thoroughly understand, I'll forge ahead and explain why I'm here. I came from Paris to-day on business connected with a venture about which you may hear later on, for everyone will hear of it. I bought a twopenny-halfpenny local paper to read while I took a smack at a restaurant—I am busy improving my French all the time—and I hit on something that's of personal interest to me."

He indicated the paragraph about Babette.

"I think I know that young girl."

Madame mentally reviewed the few facts that Babette had let fall about her history. She remembered that the girl had said that her mother was not at all a lady, and that the maternal grandfather had been a gardener or gamekeeper, she was not clear which. Evidently she knew little about her family. This must be a relative on the mother's side—perhaps an uncle whom she had never heard of. How very fortunate for the little Babette that he had not come before! The Redstones were much more eligible protectors, people of far higher class and better fortune. Yet had this rough, but quite respectable and capable-looking, man turned up before the arrival of Miss Redstone, Madame knew that she would certainly have hailed his appearance with relief, and that reflection softened her heart towards him.

"Then you know a very charming and dear little lady, Monsieur," said she kindly. "And I commiserate



you that you reach us too late to greet her. She left us only yesterday. Her father (as you no doubt have read) died with great suddenness in this house. The daughter, overcome with grief, could give me but little information. I took it on my own shoulder to acquaint her grandfather of her position. I will own to you that I was extremely anxious till the moment when the excellent aunt came to embrace her. May I ask you if you also are related to the young lady?"

The man had followed her words with close attention. He seemed to consider for a moment before replying to her question.

"Mr. Rothenstein—he called himself Rothenstein, eh?—married a near relation of mine," said he. "I feel a kind of a—curiosity about Miss Barbara. From what you say, ma'am, I take it she's well provided for. The Redstones have taken her up, eh? And she's as pleased as Punch, I suppose?"

"As——?" said Madame, puzzled both by his words and manner.

"As pleased as Punch!" he repeated. He pulled his beard thoughtfully, and his eyes twinkled. "So it's her grandfather and her aunt. Oh, the puss! the sly little puss!"

"What do you mean, Monsieur?" cried Madame Berne indignantly, and yet with some covert uneasiness. "I beg that you will speak plainly. I do not at all like that you make disrespectful remarks about my late guest, for whom I have a true affection, for I was with her in a time of great sorrow. Why is it you come here to disturb me?"

"By —— Why should I?" said the man.

His humorous eyes twinkled. He looked at her with friendliness.

"I am sure you are a good soul, ma'am," he remarked. "Just bear with me a minute. It's not my intention to be prying, nor rude, nor in any way offensive, I do assure you. But as I said, I knew that young girl when she was a small kid, though I doubt if she'd know *me* from Adam. If she'd been left forlorn

I meant to step in. Apparently there isn't any call on me. The Redstones have really adopted her, have they?"

"But she is of their own family!—their own flesh and blood!" cried Madame. "You do not *adopt* what is by nature your own. They are delighted and overjoyed to have her, and the poor, dear child, who at first seemed alone in the world, and by far too attractive to be so left, she is now happy too. It was a reunion full of joy for everyone."

"The deuce it was!" said he.

Then he came to a decision.

"For the second time of asking, *I won't upset the apple cart.*"

"Plait-il? I do not entirely comprehend Monsieur."

"What I mean is that the grand relations may jolly well keep her since everyone is so contented! As you said just now, why should I disturb 'em? It would be a shame to interfere!"

"Pardon me, Monsieur, I do not believe that the Redstone family would *permit* any interference," said Madame with some dignity. "After all, no one can be nearer to Miss Barbara than her own grandfather."

He made no rejoinder, but leaving her with the last word on that subject, he strode to the window and looked out at the pleasant garden.

"This is a long sight cleaner and prettier and altogether nicer than the inn in the town. I should uncommonly like to stay here for a night or two if you'd have me, ma'am?" he said wistfully.

"It desolates me to refuse Monsieur, but I do not take people for so short a time, nor without introduction," replied Madame.

He drew a letter from his pocket that was signed by the name of the owner of a well-known iron factory in the neighbourhood.

"My business in Compiègne is with this gentleman," he said, tapping the signature with his forefinger. "He'd speak up for me. He knows I'm solvent."

Madame Berne demurred. She liked to believe that

she was extremely particular about social standing; on the other hand, there was no fancy about the fact that she was chronically hard up. She glanced again at the man's card, which had been sent in to her.

"No, it's not what you might call a blue-blooded name," said he, reading her thought with almost startling quickness; "but I shan't disgrace you, ma'am. I mayn't be an aristocrat, but I ain't a bungler. I can mind my manners and behave prettily, I do assure you! Oh, you'll see all those nice old tabbies who are sitting doing fancy-work out there will quite enjoy me! I want to practise my French, too. There isn't actually a *rule* against men, is there? It's not a kind of old ladies' convent, is it?"

"No—but certainly no!" cried Madame. "It is but that at this season of the year the ladies preponderate. At other times we have quite a great number of gentlemen."

The newcomer smiled, but nodded an apparently undoubting assent to her statement. He might be rough, but he was far from untactful.

"I see—I see!" he said. "I am in luck in having just hit on the moment when you're not so overfull as usual. Well, well! Don't you spoil my good fortune, ma'am!"

She wavered. For her own part she liked men, and, after all, he looked quite respectable!

"I suppose I'd better just step back to that beastly, stuffy little inn to tell 'em to send my baggage up at once," he said cheerfully. "And p'raps you'll kindly show me my room, ma'am? I should like one that looks on to the garden, if you please. Table d'hôte's at seven, I suppose."

He was pleased when he found himself in a bright, fresh bedroom. Though he had roughed it a good deal in the course of his life, he had a natural love of pretty surroundings—he was pleased as Babette had been, and his pleasure was undamped by monetary anxieties. If at the bottom of his heart he was in some faint degree chagrined because the errand on

which he had come had proved fruitless, he was also rather relieved. "For we mightn't have hit it off," he reflected. "She hated me when she was a kid. She wouldn't say good-bye! She must be a sly one, too! She can't be like her mother! Barbara wasn't sly! Poor Barbara! how we fought! She'd never have had another peaceful moment if I'd let on I was alive. I'm glad I didn't! She'd never have played this game. Grandfather and aunt! Oh, Lord!"

Mr. Cole and a curé were the only representatives of their sex at table d'hôte. Miss Dupins, the other newcomer, felt slightly amused as well as rather embarrassed when she found her compatriot's chair placed next hers. She knew at once that he was not of her own class, not the sort of man with whom she would have sat at dinner at home, but she also recognized that at Madame Berne's you were expected to talk to your neighbour; you gave real offence if you did not! She bowed pleasantly, therefore, and delivered herself of a truly British remark on the weather.

Mr. Cole glanced quickly at her, responded shortly, and then plunged into a sentence in what was intended for French, which he addressed to an old lady who sat opposite to him.

He was rather annoyed when she did not understand him, but he was extraordinarily persistent. He hammered away at his remark again and again, repeating it loudly and slowly, as if under the impression that his hearer must be a little deaf. Miss Dupins felt obliged to go to the rescue at last. She alone had grasped what it was that he wished to say—she was accustomed to teaching. It was impossible to her to let anyone flounder on unaided. When he discovered that his neighbour could put his sentences straight for him, he turned to her with a flash of interest.

"Ah—*that* gives me a leg up—that's the way of it, eh?" said he. "Now I'll have another try. I've plenty to say, you know, if I could only get my tongue round their tricks and ways of saying it!"

Miss Dupins' rather sad face relaxed into amusement then.

"Oh, but you'll catch the trick in no time! To have so much courage is everything," she said.

They got on capitally after that, he intrepidly contributing matter for conversation, she putting his extraordinary phrases, delivered in an abominable accent, into decently correct idioms. He taxed all her powers, but she enjoyed her rôle, too. He was so funny and racy. He really said quite witty and amusing things to the old lady opposite, who, for her part, was charmed when they reached her in a bowdlerized edition through the discreeter lips of Miss Dupins.

The meal lasted longer than usual, and was very merry. When it was over everyone lingered for awhile in the garden, admiring the glowworms which Madame Berne had brought in a basket from the forest and had arranged on her rockery.

It was then that Mr. Cole desisted from talking bad French, and, for the first time that evening, seemed inclined to converse directly with his countrywoman. He drew a wicker chair up to hers and relaxed into English.

"It was kind of you to help me through my talk at dinner," said he. "And it was all the kinder because, when I sat down by your side, what you naturally thought to yourself was, that I wasn't your sort at all."

Miss Dupins actually blushed, a fact not lost on him. She was over thirty-five, and she was used to command, but she was more accustomed to women than to men, and Mr. Cole made her feel bashful, though she upbraided herself for such absurd self-consciousness. Indeed, she was constitutionally shy, though circumstances had led her to the acquirement of a very self-possessed manner. Her calm, soft grey eyes looked very straight at people and life from under their level brows. They had seldom regarded their own reflection in a glass with any interest. Her features were clear cut, but the mouth was sad and inclined to

severity, though not to peevishness; her soft jet-black hair was parted in the middle, and rippled prettily on either side of a low, broad forehead. It was done with no thought of the fashion or even of the becoming, so that it was rather by good luck than good management that the style suited her.

"Indeed, there was but little kindness to boast of, for it gave me pleasure to help you to express yourself," she replied. "My French will be the better for such rubbing up, too. I was struck by the great number of words that you know, although, of course (if you will excuse my saying so), you do not speak the language, yet your vocabulary is extensive."

"I peg away at dictionaries, and I've a good memory. Not a bad pupil, eh?" said he. "I saw at once that teaching comes natural to you. I suspect it's your line."

He showed a really remarkable perspicacity. Miss Dupins smiled as she owned that it had been her line for a great many years.

"Ever since I was young," she said.

"Then I suppose that you are taking a holiday?" said he.

"I am seriously thinking of giving up my post, though to do so will be a great grief to me," she said sadly, and wondered, even as the words escaped her, why she had said so much.

That question as to whether she should, or should not resign, had been haunting her day and night. She had gone over the pros and cons till her brain felt like a squirrel in a cage, turning round and round with busy, weary impotence. An ugly scandal had occurred in connection with someone in the college. Miss Dupins had acted vigorously and promptly when she discovered it, but it was evident to her that her vigilance had been too lax; she had been slow to suspect, and the revelation of evil had startled and distressed her beyond measure. She blamed herself severely, even to the point of morbidity.

Mr. Cole looked at her with shrewd attention.

"You've been overworked, haven't you?"

She shook her head. "Oh, no; I enjoy work. I should be miserable without plenty of it. But something happened which has made me doubt my own competence. The committee were most kind: they acquitted me of all blame; but, of course, what others say makes no difference. One stands or falls by one's own conscience."

She had never been in the habit of asking advice. She had consulted no one on this subject till this moment. Indeed, she did not realize that she was consulting anyone now, but Mr. Cole seemed to think that his opinion had been asked.

"Is yours a responsible billet?" he inquired.

"Very—oh, most responsible," she replied, with grave pride.

"Ah, then, that's bad," said he. "If you can resign, I should say you'd better do so."

Miss Dupins gasped. For a second she felt as if there were something oracular about the promptly expressed verdict of this stranger.

"No offence intended, ma'am," he said, noticing her surprise.

"I am not offended," she answered him; "but really, Mr.—" She hesitated.

"Jethro Cole is my name. You'll hear of it again, I fancy," he put in.

"But really, Mr. Cole, do you not think that you are rash in giving judgment on a subject about which you know so very little?"

He considered for a moment, and then replied, quite good-humouredly:

"No—no, I don't think that. I don't see why I shouldn't give my opinion for what it's worth. I'm not accustomed to society, as you notice, but it appears to me that there can be no salt left in talk if you are too careful. You've got to risk something, even in conversation, if you mean to get at any returns worth having. That's how I am looking at it."

Miss Dupins reflected on his conversation during dinner, on its wild risking of grammar and its intrepid plunges into anecdote and description. She fairly laughed.

"Perhaps you are right," she said.

"I fancy I am; but I don't know the rules of the game yet—it is all new to me. I have never been in the way of talking with ladies. I hope, however"—he aspirated his *h* very carefully—"I hope to have many more such opportunities in the future."

"I think, judging by to-night, that you will make the most of opportunities," she commented courteously, "and I hope that they may be many and pleasant."

"Thank you—thank you for your kind wishes," said Mr. Cole. "The fact is, I made a baddish start, and have had to make it up in middle age. It is a great nuisance that one so soon passes the longest day, isn't it? I'm sorry to be through my youth in some ways—very sorry—but there's no use crying over spilt milk. One must just make the most of what is left before dull old age comes on one. There's such a deal to learn and to do and to enjoy, and not overmuch time for it all."

He drew a quick, impatient breath as he spoke. His companion could have found it in her heart to envy him. Never in all her conscientious days had she looked at life from this point of view of enjoyment, but there were certainly moments when she, too, dreaded the decline of her powers.

Miss Dupins was not an unsympathetic woman, though her sympathy was not very facile or easily expressed. She came to the conclusion that something had quite lately befallen her companion. Perhaps he had struck oil, or inherited an unexpected fortune. She was aware that he was excited and in a somewhat abnormal mood. She felt moved to friendliness.

"Well, I think you will have to marry. A wife will redeem the dulness of age, and sons and daughters may carry on your doings to the next generation," she said.



He laughed, but on the wrong side of his mouth.

"Why, that's true. I shall hate leaving profits to strangers. But children never did take to me, never!"

"It is a sign of my increasing years that I no longer dare to sit in a garden too late, for fear of rheumatism. I must be going indoors now," she remarked. She rose and drew a shawl over her slim shoulders. Insomnia had made her dread the night. She felt rather grateful to Mr. Cole for having distracted her mind for a time from that obsessing problem.

"I wonder," she said, as she shook hands with him on bidding him good-night—he insisted on shaking hands—"I wonder why you said that I had better give up my post? But never mind; I dare say you had no reason. You just ventured the observation in order to—to 'put salt in the conversation.'"

"Brummagen salt hasn't much flavour," said he, almost roughly. "I meant what I said. I don't know the ins and outs of your business, nor pretend to give advice. Perhaps your bread and butter depends on your sticking to it? All I meant was that it doesn't do—not as a broad, general rule—it doesn't do for responsible people to lose confidence in themselves. When they do it's so dangerous for the machine they're in charge of that unless they can get their confidence back they had better get off the box-seat. That's all."

"I see. Thank you. Good-night," said she.

She did not enlighten him as to how or where she got her bread and butter, and they held no more *tête-à-tête* converse, though she continued to help him to converse at table d'hôte till the end of the week, when he left Compiègne, having most successfully accomplished the bit of business in connection with the iron-works which had originally brought him to France.

He thanked Miss Dupins for her French lessons when he took leave of her, and, rather to her amusement, he presented her at parting with an exceedingly stiff bouquet of flowers.

## SECOND PART



## CHAPTER I

SIR HUBERT REDSTONE was one of the few musicians who have made as well as inherited a large fortune. He was still a youngish man when his opera of "Persephone" was performed by royal command to a distinguished audience.

He was knighted by Queen Victoria on his fortieth birthday. That birthday was thirty-five years ago at the time when this story begins, and troubles as well as honours had fallen thickly on him since. His beautiful and dearly loved wife had died in her prime. His eldest boy had been killed in a little border war; his second son had died (like the mother) of decline; his third had turned out badly. And that last was by far the worst trouble of all: the others had made clean wounds, sharp, indeed, at the time (for Sir Hubert's affections were warm and strong), but with no poison in them. He could bear such afflictions with courage and dignity, but he did not know how to meet disgrace; that bewildered and angered him.

He had had no serious misgivings or premonitions about poor Stephen; the blow fell quite unexpectedly. Certainly the boy had not done well at school, but somehow Sir Hubert had taken his delinquencies lightly. The other children had never been spoilt, but discipline was relaxed when the fag end of the family was reached. Perhaps also the increase of wealth tends to relaxation; and, then, Stephen was motherless. He was rather delicate, too, and it was hard to know how much allowance to make for that, and he had considerable musical talent, a taste which endeared

him to his father, although Sir Hubert was dead set against his son following music as a profession.

"Your Muse is pretty enough to flirt with! There's not enough of her to make her worth living for, or by," he had said, no doubt truly enough. "You take my advice, my boy. Take to law as a profession, and keep your pretty little Muse as your mistress!"

Stephen acquiesced. He nearly always shirked contention and followed the line of least resistance.

Poor Sir Hubert said that Stephen was really a very sensible young fellow, who gave no trouble whatever if you took him the right way. His house-master at Eton and that ridiculous old Oxford don who had written disquieting letters evidently never had understood him in the least; it was odd how little school-masters understood boys.

Then came the rather bad moment when Stephen tentatively revealed serious money difficulties, and applied (somewhat hesitatingly) to his father to help him out.

Sir Hubert was never stingy—indeed, his generosity was apt to be almost too lavish—but he was a man of moods, and at the moment when Stephen spoke a somewhat Spartan mood had taken possession of him. It would do the young man no harm to see that he couldn't always get all he wanted by dipping his hand into his father's purse, he thought. So he refused without compunction, and without anger—he had not the remotest idea of the real state of the case.

Afterwards he reproached Stephen for never having come to him.

"Didn't you know that I would sooner have parted with all I have than have a son who is a liar and a thief?" he had said bitterly.

"But I did go to you—first; I did try to explain, but you wouldn't listen," Stephen had said, and the protest had roused Sir Hubert to fresh indignation.

"Tried! . . . *tried* to explain! You are not man enough even to own a sin fairly. You are not man

enough to repent! You can't face anything squarely—not even yourself. I see that now!” Sir Hubert had cried, and put his hands—those fine, sensitive musician's hands—before his eyes, as if he were blinded by the horrible vision.

“Well, luckily for you, you won't be called on to face prison, since at least you've had the nous to steal from your own father. I shall acknowledge this signature, of course. You may cash the money on it. It's very badly done,” he added grimly. “It would not take in a child, and Barton wasn't born yesterday—but he will have to accept my word for it.”

Stephen did not say “Thank you”—no one can say “Thank you” when a reprieve is hurled contemptuously at his head—neither did he offer any further protest or excuse.

“I suppose you'd rather never see me again?” was all he did say. “There's only one thing I can do—I can go.” And he went, and, as a matter of fact, his family never did see him again.

His father paid him a quarterly allowance through Mr. Barton (who, no doubt, had his suspicions), and buried the affair in silence.

Sir Hubert was fiercely ashamed. He held his fine old head high, but he never forgot that there was a stain on his shield; and yet, when the first flush of anger had died away, he hardly desired that that decree of banishment should remain absolute. It was Stephen who insisted on that—Stephen, who had no right to pride, but who, in his own wrong-headed, lazy, illogical way, was very proud indeed.

Stephen never expressed repentance; possibly he never felt it. His father waited for it in vain. He never attempted to redeem the past, but neither did he embark in any wild career of crime. He had got into the original scrape through a speculation, into which he had been entrapped by a supposed friend; he never speculated again, and he fought shy of friendship after that.

He retired from the Bar (though, since his disgrace was never published, that seemed unnecessary). He never wrote to, or held further communication with, his father.

Some years after that final tragic break, that was so much more tragic and final than it need have been, Mr. Barton acquainted Sir Hubert with the fact of Stephen's marriage. Stephen had written to the banker, asking if he might be allowed to forestall a year's allowance, on the plea of expenses entailed by his wife's illness.

"Ask him who his wife was? Find out if she's anyone at all possible, and if there are any children, and when he married her," Sir Hubert said.

Stephen vouchsafed no reply to the inquiry beyond the curt remark that if the granting of the slight convenience he asked for entailed the answering of impertinent questions as to his private affairs, he preferred to withdraw his request.

"He seems to labour under a misapprehension," Mr. Barton, who had never liked Stephen, remarked dryly; "he always seems to imagine that *he* was the injured party."

"Then there's nothing to be done—there never has been anything to be done," said Sir Hubert drearily.

"Shall I prosecute inquiries?" asked Mr. Barton.

"No. Why should I pry into another man's business against his wish? No doubt it is better left alone. It is nothing to me," said Sir Hubert. But it was something to him: it was a rankling thorn in his heart.

Well, if unlucky in the matter of sons, he was fortunate in other ways: his daughters loved him much; his home was full of beauty and peace; he was royal in his benefactions, and deservedly respected, not only for his great genius but for his character.

Very few artists combine business capability with their artistic gifts, but Sir Hubert was one of those few. His detractors (for, like most people of strongly

marked traits, he made enemies) had been inclined to deny his genius on account of his popularity; but they were wrong, and he was quite aware that they were wrong. Criticism troubled him very little, and only those of his own household knew that underneath his surface pride lay a deep humility.

He was an occasionally autocratic and occasionally impatient master, but he was adored by those who served him, and was a steady friend to his old servants. He would show an almost womanly tenderness for anything maimed or weak or old.

His fine leonine head, with the piercing, eager, dark eyes and slightly Jewish cast of countenance, crowned with its thick waves of grey hair, has been immortalized by the greatest portrait-painter of his day, and he was a well-known figure in London society; but he was also even better and more familiarly known in a certain German-Jewish hospital in the East End, where an audience of no mean acumen often listened to his music. There, he declared, were "his best critics."

There, too, were children, to whom he was a dear, familiar friend, and who associated him not so much with music as with toys—wonderful, expensive toys, such as usually fall to the share of the children of the rich. He liked children, and sometimes as he played with some delicately-featured little London-bred girl (how pretty London children are!), or with some sharp little Cockney of a lad, that thorn in his heart would prick suddenly.

He was "our gentleman" to these city brats, and they were not at all afraid of him.

"Is there a granddaughter of mine growing up somewhere who may be something like this little girl, or a grandson who may be about the age of this boy?" he would ask himself, and "Why isn't my son's child sitting on my knee?"

Once he all but wrote a letter to Stephen, when he came back from that ward where his child-friends lived—all but. But Stephen's unwarrantable attitude



made it impossible, and so he hardened his heart again, and the years slid by. They slid faster and faster as he grew old, for that is the way they have. In childhood they creep slowly—oh, so slowly; in youth they begin to mend the pace; in middle age they canter; but after the fifties they rush, like horses who see home in view.

Sir Hubert was seventy-five now, but a very strong and vigorous old man for his years. He liked to have both his daughters with him, and the younger of the two, Mrs. Durnham, had practically lived in her father's house since the death of her husband.

Mrs. Durnham had married young, had been a wife for five years and a widow for over twenty. She was devoted to her own family, and even during her short married life had somehow seemed to belong more to her paternal home than to her husband's, but her son was perversely quite unlike a Redstone. To begin with, his poetical name sat oddly on the sandy-haired, plain little chap. So soon as he was old enough to resent anything he resented the fact that he had been christened Siegfried.

"It wasn't fair, mummy," he declared; but he had never a ready tongue, and he could not explain why he felt unfairly handicapped.

He was an honest and good-tempered little lad who loved the open air, though he had never excelled in any kind of game, who disliked his school lessons, and who developed very slowly.

When he was about twelve years old he once said very wistfully:

"Mother, don't you think it would be much jollier if you and I were to go and live right away from the others in a home that we could have all to ourselves, a long way off from any town, somewhere where there are no people, but lots of grass and trees and birds and insects, and a stream to fish, and where we need never have regular meals, or wear collars, or change our boots for lunch."

Mrs. Durnham had not received the idea with enthusiasm.

"I do not wish my son to grow up a savage; I wish him to be a gentleman like his grandfather," she had replied somewhat ponderously. Perhaps the constant holding up of Sir Hubert as an example had been rather depressing to the boy, who instinctively knew that, whatever else he might be when he grew up, he could never resemble that fiery and impulsive genius who had been the beau-ideal of his mother and his aunt. He had tacitly resisted taking the family stamp, with that good-humoured, stolid, unconscious resistance that is far more baffling than an active and bad-tempered opposition.

"Such a good boy! But, of course, one must not expect too much of him."

That was what his grandfather and aunt said, with a shrug of the shoulders and kindly tolerant smile.

As for his mother, she loved her boy because he was hers, and resented any slight on him with a silent but passionate resentment. Yet she would have liked him to be brilliant, handsome, and clever like her own family. She could willingly have forgiven a few youthful extravagances, or condoned a few follies, but Siegfried never committed any that were worth mentioning.

He had the character of being rather lazy when he was a little fellow, but as he grew older he improved, and his contemporaries had a certain respect for him. His character carried weight in the upper form, though it was impossible to strike a spark of ambition out of him. He shamelessly owned that he never even desired to excel.

"I'd just as soon the other chaps got all the prizes and that," he remarked, to his mother's chagrin and his grandfather's impatience.

"You see, some of them are awfully keen about them, and I'm not."

In due course he went to Cambridge, where during

the first term it was agreed that "the dear steady boy was really doing very well *for him*."

The tone of faint disparagement did not disturb him in the least. He and his mother never did have a home all to themselves, and he had quite ceased to desire that arrangement; he was a very reasonable person. Indeed, his grandfather was apt to feel baffled by Siegfried's excellent and imperturbable common sense, and to wish that the young man were of a warmer disposition. Siegfried's good-humour rubbed the older man the wrong way, and possibly that was why the grandson got into a habit of spending his vacations away from home.

He was away now, but Mrs. Durnham had written urgently begging him to return. She had an uneasy, unexpressed fear lest this new-found grandchild should cut out her own son. Her father and Julie were both so terribly impulsive, there was never any knowing how they would take things; but, for her part, she was not erratic. *She* would never have taken sudden possession of Babette, dashing off to France at half a day's notice. She would never have lost her heart to the girl at first sight, nor sent that excitedly written letter to her father, which startled him on the slopes of the Pyrenees and made him fling over his carefully planned tour and hurry home post-haste, despite her remonstrances.

Mrs. Durnham was growing stout, and, though comely, she was no longer young. She observed with truth that, having waited so many years before seeing, or even hearing of the existence of a granddaughter, he might very well allow those few extra hours entailed by breaking the journey, and taking it in leisurely and comfortable manner befitting his age and hers. Her protest was of no avail. Her father's soul had youth in it still, whatever marks years might have made on his body. So they travelled breathlessly, and reached London some days before the arrival of Miss Redstone and Babette.

## CHAPTER II

SIR HUBERT REDSTONE paced up and down the long music-room, glancing every other minute at the clock. Mrs. Durnham sat in a high-backed carved chair, working at a piece of tapestry which was stretched on a frame which stood in front of her; her large white hands moved deftly, otherwise she sat very still. She wore her thick dark hair in a plaited coronet round her head; her features were large, and her full lips rather heavy. She was not unlike a portrait of Titian's, and she had a kind of medieval dignity about her, which was as unfashionable as the way in which she did her hair. Her large eyes, under full white drooping lids, surprised one now and again by the amount of passionate feeling they could express; but, as a rule, she was apt to be almost lethargic, slow both of tongue and movement. Sir Hubert was fond of both his daughters, and he often found Harriet's passivity restful as an antidote to Julie's tendency to gush; but during this last week she had made him impatient, perhaps because he divined some lack of sympathy.

The beautiful, artistic room in which they awaited the travellers opened on to a garden at one end. The windows were thrown wide on the garden side, and the sweet stillness of the summer evening was only not quite country stillness. It was wonderfully quiet for London, but if you listened you could just hear the hum of traffic. The house stood within five minutes' walk of Kensington High Street; fifty years ago it would have stood among green fields.

A deep frieze, representing Night fleeing before Day,

decorated the room. The grey figure of Night was drawing his mantle over his bowed head as he departed. Day had shafts of light in his hand and was instinct with vigorous youth. The frieze gave added dignity to a singularly beautiful and restful place. The piano stood on a dais at one end; the few pieces of furniture were for the most part Italian and carved by a sixteenth-century artist, but there was an ebony cabinet from Spain, which hid treasures of pure and brilliant colour behind its doors, every drawer being exquisitely inlaid with enamelled scenes from Don Quixote. Otherwise the room was somewhat bare, and in no way spoilt or cut up by too much detail and too many ornaments.

Sir Hubert's taste was excellent, but somewhat severe. He hated fallals, and he liked to have a clear space in which to walk comfortably.

"They are late! Surely they are extraordinarily late!" he cried.

"Oh no! The boat train is often behind time; it is by no means extraordinary," said Mrs. Durnham.

Sir Hubert laughed impatiently. "Is it not? But everything is extraordinary, my dear Harriet," said he. "It is extraordinary that we should be expecting a grown-up grandchild whom I have never set eyes on, of whose very existence I have not known till within these last weeks. It's extraordinary that Stephen should have been a father and I never have had a word from him, that now he should be dead——"

He broke off short, and his fine old face quivered. He paused in his pacing, and, sitting down by the piano, began to play—first a dirge, then a chorale.

"Death the Peacemaker—Death the Revealer," he muttered.

Mrs. Durnham drew a thread from the skeins of silk on her lap.

"It is getting too dark to distinguish shades of colour. Shall I turn up the lights?" she asked.

"No, no," he replied. "It would be hard on her to

come into a blaze of lights, for Julie says she is very sensitive. We must never be hard on her. Above all things, Harriet, remember that no one is ever to be hard on her."

"Julie has evidently taken immensely to her. She writes enthusiastically, but then we know that Julie always does take up people very vehemently," said Mrs. Durnham, in a ruminating and non-committal tone.

"Ah yes," said he; "very likely she is not all that Julie describes. I tell myself so, often. I must not build on Julie's accounts. Perhaps my grandchild is not at all charming. Possibly she is vain and pert and frivolous and vulgar, but that must make no difference—no difference whatever. She is still my grandchild."

Mrs. Durnham raised her head and looked across at the figure by the piano. She felt a smouldering irritation.

"But it would make a difference. Whatever you may say, you would find pert vulgarity extremely difficult to bear with," she remarked.

Her father and her sister were alike in one respect, she reflected. They were both apt to propound wonderful theories of conduct which they believed themselves capable of acting up to, not taking their own very human natures the least into account.

"All the same, I hope she is presentable. No harm in hoping that, eh, Harriet?" he added, with a quick change of mood.

"You have got one grandchild already; isn't that enough?" Mrs. Durnham said under her breath, but Sir Hubert did not hear her, for at that moment the travellers arrived.

Miss Redstone came quickly into the room, eager and much excited.

"Dear, dearest father! Here we are! I've brought her with me. Here is our little Babette! Here is your granddaughter!" she cried.

Sir Hubert came down the steps of the dais holding out both his hands. In the growing dusk he could just

see a very slight black-robed figure and the gleam of fair hair. Perhaps it was his sight as well as the light that was rather dim.

"You are welcome to your home, granddaughter," said he.

Babette said nothing whatever.

"The poor dear child is tired," said Miss Redstone. "We have been through such trials together. Never, never shall I forget our first meeting. We recognized each other instinctively. I just held out my arms, though the poor little thing had never so much as heard of me before, had you, dear one?"

"No, never, Aunt Julie," assented the girl in a low voice.

Sir Hubert listened eagerly to its tone. No! her voice wasn't pert or vulgar. It was low and musical. He could not wait longer. He stretched out his left hand, and a shaded electric light glowed. With his right he drew Babette gently towards it and unfastened her cloak.

The wrap fell at her feet and she stood revealed—so slim and girlish, such a mere slip of a thing! The women of the Redstone family were usually imposing, and they developed early. At eighteen his daughter Julie had been quite full-grown, and Harriet Durnham had been a handsome woman at sixteen, but this girl was quite different.

"Why, you are not much more than a child! I can't believe you are seventeen! Well, well, you'll soon get used to us all, little girl," he said, patting the hand he held, and trying to see her downcast face. It became suffused with colour at his words. Babette's eyes swam with tears as she lifted them to look at him.

"You—you said that like *him*," she cried, and could say no more.

"Poor child! poor child! Then you loved your poor father? There, I am glad you loved him—that speaks well for Stephen," he said huskily.

Then he turned to Mrs. Durnham.

"You must be introduced to your Aunt Harriet now."

Mrs. Durnham did not offer to kiss, but very placidly held out her hand.

"How do you do, Babette. You had better go to take off your hat, and then come straight down to the dining-room. We are getting terribly hungry, Julie, for my father would insist on waiting dinner for you!"

Babette was quite thankful that her Aunt Harriet did not fold her in her arms, or make touching speeches, or burst into tears over her. She felt as if she could not have borne any more storms of emotion.

Her Aunt Harriet was a very grand lady, in her sweeping satin gown, and with that thick coronet of hair!

Babette admired large women, and she was struck by Mrs. Durnham's beautiful contralto voice that sounded as if it ought to declaim in tragedy blank verse, and that made her most practical remarks emphatic. As for Sir Hubert, her heart went out to him at once. "If he isn't my grandfather he ought to have been," thought Babette. "For we should agree so very well!"

An elderly grey-haired woman came to meet Miss Redstone and Babette as they mounted the stairs.

"Oh, Hannah, I've got my niece all safe," cried Miss Redstone. "You'll be pleased, I know! You'll like to have a young lady to look after! Babette, this is Hannah, who has lived with us for close on forty years, and who knew your father when he was only your age!"

"Pleased I am, miss, I'm sure," said Hannah.

Babette regarded her with interest, for this old-fashioned type of English servant was as unfamiliar to her as the beautiful house.

In spite of her years in town, Hannah still looked like a countrywoman, and still spoke with a soft Devonian accent and a leisurely intonation. She was stout for a housemaid, and had an air of comfortable placidity about her. Babette held out her hand to the old woman with a shy smile.



"How do you do, Hannah? I am glad you are pleased to see me," she said.

Babette instinctively did the right thing, as Miss Redstone observed with delight. She had never dreamt of shaking hands with Célestine.

"Quite well, I thank you, miss, and hoping you are the same," said Hannah, and thereupon took possession of the young lady with calm but evident satisfaction, for she loved to have something young in the house.

She led Babette down a passage and opened the door of a good-sized room, that looked on to the garden. The room was pretty, and had a virginal air about it. The walls were papered in white, and the little bedstead was white, and so was the clean new furniture that Sir Hubert had chosen himself for the expected grandchild. Babette sat down on a low cushioned chair and laughed for very pleasure.

"How pretty, oh, how pretty and sweet!" she cried. "Surely this isn't a bit like a London house? It is not the London I knew."

"Well, miss, it's a clean part *for* London, but the smuts do find their way in even here; they'd surprise you," said Hannah. "I often do say, miss, that there is something terrible cunning about dirt."

Babette gave a little start, then laughed again, but not so happily.

"Oh, Hannah, I've just caught sight of myself in that long glass. I am an inky black spot in this clean place."

"Yes, miss. I've brought you some hot water and a sponge. What with the railroad and the steamer you have got a bit smutty," said Hannah placidly. "If you'll stand up and let me help you off with your dress now, you'll have time to slip into your tea-gown. It's ready laid out for you. Miss Redstone sent word that I was to get something ready-made that you could just step into the first evening on your arrival. If I might make so bold as to say so to you, she was that anxious that Sir Hubert should see you looking your nicest at

dinner, miss, for gentlemen like him, they don't know they take account of clothes, but they do make a difference."

"Oh yes, Hannah! They do indeed! and that is why it is so horrid never to have enough nice clothes," said the girl earnestly.

She jumped up and ran to the bed, where a black tea-gown was spread out for her inspection.

"What a darling! oh, and it's got a silk foundation!" Babette cried ecstatically.

She washed her face and hands, interspersing the washing with fresh exclamations over the pretty china.

Hannah wondered a little, but was pleased, too!

"The poor lamb hadn't been used to having things nice," she remarked to herself. "It was good to see her come into her own."

Hannah's ideas were absolutely fixed and quite feudal. She believed in the inalienable birthright of the upper classes, nice things were "their own." If they were poor they were defrauded like discrowned Kings, and no modern arguments would ever disturb her belief in the least.

"There are a lot of ignorant poor creatures in the world to be sure. There seems to be more and more of 'em every year now, and the curious nonsense they do talk is more than an instructed person could believe if she didn't hear it," Hannah would say with her sweet obstinate smile.

She brushed the girl's bright soft hair tenderly, and Babette twisted it up deftly on the top of her little head. The tea-gown was loose for her, but that did not matter, and her arms and neck shone dazzlingly white out of its soft filmy blackness.

She had never before seen herself in an evening gown, and she surveyed her reflection in the glass gravely when she had finished dressing.

"You look wonderfully nice, Babette! You never *looked* so nice before," she said solemnly, and added in her own heart, "and you never were so naughty."

She was nervous, but elated, too, as she ran downstairs. She felt as if she were acting in a play, and was not quite perfect in her part; she enjoyed acting!

They did not dine in the dining-room, but outside on the terrace of the garden.

A moss-green carpet was spread, and the electric light was cleverly arranged in silver candlesticks to light the alfresco meal. Miss Redstone sat at the head of the table, the newly discovered grandchild at Sir Hubert's left hand, with Mrs. Durnham opposite.

"Your cousin Siegfried is in the fens of Lancashire investigating the nursery arrangements of a certain Mrs. Beetle whose name I forget," said Sir Hubert, with a tolerant laugh. "I wanted him to come home to make your acquaintance this week—but he doesn't care about being here."

Babette thought that her cousin Siegfried must be a singularly stupid person! What more could anyone want than this? She was too excited to eat much, and was still haunted by a curious sense of unreality. She enjoyed the gleam of silver, the pretty china, the dim background of garden. Every now and again small drab-coloured moths flew madly out of the darkness at the lights, and fell with scorched wings and writhing bodies on to the tablecloth. Babette hated to see them do that! She did not want to remember that pain or maiming and death existed. She felt as if she had stolen into a kind of Eden, but as if it were not a very safely guarded Paradise! There were spectres hiding and lying in wait only just beyond the radius of the lights. The pupils of her eyes dilated as she gazed into the shadows, till the eyes themselves seemed very dark, much darker than they appeared in daylight.

She was shy, but not at all awkward. She held her small, well-shaped head, with its soft crown of hair, very erect. When Sir Hubert spoke to her she answered in a soft, low voice, with a clear, rather deliberate, pronunciation.

Miss Redstone saw that Sir Hubert kept on glancing at the girl. She burnt to know what impression Babette was making. When dessert was on the table, and her father lit his pipe, she could restrain her desire no longer.

"I am sure you are tired to death, dear child. Hadn't you better run away to your room. We are very late. There's St. Mary Abbott's striking the quarter now," she said, her nervous fingers drumming impatiently on the table. Like most enthusiastic champions of protégées, she longed to hear comments, to evoke praise.

Babette knew they wished to talk about her. She got up at once, and demurely agreed that she was tired, though, as a matter of fact, she was thrilling and tingling with excitement. She bid them each good-night, like a good child, but when she got to Sir Hubert she said :

"Thank you very much for having me here."

"Tch—tch—you needn't thank me. Why, who else has a better right to you, granddaughter?" said he.

"Oh, no one," said Babette—"no one in all the world;" and her voice sounded sad.

He noticed the touch of sadness at once.

"We are an elderly household—all too old for you, excepting Siegfried. But you will try to be happy with us, eh, little girl?" he said kindly.

"Try! Why, I do think I should be a silly idiot of a girl if I were not happy," Babette said, so emphatically that they all laughed, well pleased.

Their laughter followed her as she obediently went towards the house. She had not meant to be funny; she had spoken in all good faith.

"I think—I really think they like me," she said to herself.

### CHAPTER III

As Babette crossed the hall she met Célestine, who had had her supper with the Redstones' servants, and was now going to take leave of the lady who had borrowed her for that sudden trip to France.

Célestine was always trim and neat, but she looked less sprightly than usual. She was a thin, sallow girl, narrow shouldered, and not in the least pretty, though she had a certain style about her. Babette had never quite liked her, but she paused to bid her good-bye, for Célestine had been most attentive during the crossing.

"I suppose you are going back to your own mistress now," said she pleasantly.

"Hélas, yes, Mademoiselle," said Célestine, "I stay 'ere in this so beautiful 'ouse as long as possible; but Mrs. Graham, she expect me to-night—it is time I return."

"Are you sorry the journey is over? I am glad; but then I am an abominably bad sailor," said Babette.

"Without doubt Mademoiselle must be glad. She goes to a life full with all that is most ravishing. I go to work," said Célestine.

"Poor Célestine!" said Babette, with heartfelt commiseration, as she turned away.

Miss Redstone gave Célestine a handsome tip, and expressed herself well satisfied with her services. The girl thanked her profusely, and departed with fervent protestations of regret and gratitude.

"The most useful maid I ever had," said Miss Redstone with a sigh, "and so devoted to me! I am quite touched by her grief at leaving me."

"It cannot be more than skin deep, seeing she has only been with you three weeks!" said Mrs. Durnham, but they did not pursue the topic, having a far more interesting subject of converse than the depth of Célestine's affection.

Mrs. Graham's house was not much more than a stone's throw from Sir Hubert's, but Célestine did not go straight back. Instead, she lingered in Holland Walk, looking expectantly up and down the long avenue. Presently a red coat loomed between the trees, and the expression of expectation on Célestine's face changed and softened into a wistful radiance that made her almost pretty.

The soldier slid his arm round her waist when he came up to her, and gave her a hasty kiss.

"So you're back, Tiny!" he said.

"That makes you glad, Jahnnie!" She pronounced the "J" softly, as in "Jean."

"Did you like being in foreign parts? But there! They *ain't* foreign to you, because you are a little froggy," he said, laughing, with a touch of British superiority. "Law! How you flew at me once for calling you a froggy!"

They sat together on a seat under the plane-trees. The summer was still young, and the leaves were still unsmirched. Célestine did not fly either at or from him now.

"For me, my country is your country, Jahnnie," said she softly.

Poor Célestine! Her "affairs" might be conducted in decidedly second-rate style. Her "Jahnnie" hadn't much beyond his looks to recommend him; the courtship had been carried on in a very hole-and-corner fashion; sordid anxieties were beginning to press on her; and yet Love himself spoke just then from her lips as surely as from the lips of the Jewish maiden long ago (of whom, I fear, she had never heard), and Love himself cannot be vulgar, though he certainly finds strange quarters at times, and gets mixed up with queer companions.

"It does me good at heart to be in England again, because you are in England; but for all other reasons I liked better to be in France," she explained. "Miss Redstone, she require much attention, she ring bells often, she change her mind often—one day she like things arranged one way, and another day she like it all quite different, and she always forget what she said the day before; but I manage—I suit her well, and she pay me well; if I could stay with her I would. I like it much more than there," with a jerk of her head in the direction of Mrs. Graham's house. "That lady, she look so soft, but she hard as paving-stones underneath, and she see all round and right through, and—and I can't stay with her much longer, Jahnnie, for she will find out soon."

Jahnnie whistled. He looked disconcerted, bored, and ashamed.

"What a nuisance women are! I suppose you've saved enough to manage on?"

Célestine assented with some pride.

"Oh yes, Jahnnie! I am not a nuisance—me! I nevair, nevair ask you for one sou. Is it not true? Hein?"

"You wouldn't get it if you did, for I haven't got it to give. What with the way we're fined, and one thing and another," said he gloomily, "I'm sure I lead a dog's life, Tiny. The sergeant's got a down on me. Now, just to show you, I'll tell you what happened last week"; and he embarked on a long tale of the mean persecutions which dogged him.

Célestine listened with a kind of maternal solicitude. She was actually a year younger than he was, but she always felt as if she were twenty years older. Johnnie was rather a handsome young man, fair complexioned, with bright hair that tried to curl, though the regimental scissors didn't allow it much chance. The discipline of the army had been the making of him physically. He now measured inches more round the chest than he had when hunger had driven him to

enlist two years previously, but he was by no means grateful for benefits received. He hated soldiering; sometimes he wasn't quite sure that he didn't hate it even more than he hated being hungry. Célestine had been his one consolation, and he had married her a twelvemonth ago. She was not on the strength of the regiment, and he was supposed to be a single man. She had never (as she boasted) cost him a penny. Indeed, Johnnie was one of the people to whom the paying of a price always seems a grievance. He had his pleasure—and Célestine paid. That appeared to him the more natural arrangement, and he did not wish it altered. He did not even approve of her sympathy being distracted from his affairs to her own. Anxiety was pressing heavily on her just now, and it slightly irritated him to see the pinched, sharpened look on her face.

Célestine had gone as a single woman to Mrs. Graham. She was a clever dressmaker, as well as an accomplished courier. Left to herself she certainly would never want; but handicapped with a baby? well, that was another and serious question.

"Mon Dieu! I wish I were Mademoiselle Babette," she said with a sigh; "she is a lucky one, that one!"

"Lucky? Yes, they are lucky; but our turn will come one day," said he. "The trouble is it mayn't be in my time! I'd like to 'ave my fingers in the looting of Grosvenor Square or Park Lane. Sometimes I lie awake of nights just to fancy it like!"

He stared before him with eyes full of greedy visions. Alas, alas! when our young men dream dreams of this description the prophecies of the prophets may well be gloomy!

"It amuse you to fancy those things, but it do you no good, Jahnnie," said Célestine wisely. "It only make it all the harder."

"There was a fellow I 'eard speaking in Trafalgar Square. 'E said: 'The tiara of the flaunting rich woman would clothe a hundred of 'er poor sisters who



shiver in their rags, and the surplus food of wasteful, idle gluttons at the West-End clubs would give a full meal to all the 'ungry in London, and the bank from which these swindlers draw their dibs 'ave got enough capital to set all the white slaves free, and why didn't we take our share?' I tell you 'e made me think."

Célestine sighed. "It is what we all desire, to 'ave much money and not too much work," said she. "You would like to 'ave no work at all; but for me I am not like dat. I would be vary 'appy if I could 'ave a leetle 'ome and sew and cook and take care of my baby when it come, and my 'usband."

Johnnie did not respond to these aspirations. He sat kicking a hole in the gravel with the heel of his boot, and his gloom deepened.

"It's a d——d bad old planet, that's what it is," he averred.

Célestine made an effort to disperse their melancholy; she could not bear to leave him in the dumps! She liked to see him smile and to bring the boyishness back to the face which was becoming permanently lowering and sullen in expression.

Before their marriage, while they were still keeping company, she had often made him laugh. He had told her she was the funniest froggy in the world then.

She began to recount to him her experiences as travelling maid, but he refused to be amused.

"It makes me sick to think of them rich females 'avin' nothing to do but run about and enjoy themselves, and *me* 'avin' to slave from mornin' to night, with no more will than a machine, and like as not food for powder and dead in a ditch at the end! It ain't as if they was better than me either. It's all just haccident. 'The blind haccident of birth,' the fellow called it in his speech. That wasn't my fault, was it?"

"But no indeed! We would all be well born if we could," said Célestine with a sigh; "I wish that mine could be born a king," she added under her breath;

but, seeing that the wish brought a heavier frown to Johnnie's brow, and that he was becoming decidedly bored by these allusions, she hastily sought again for a more amusing subject of conversation.

"Now I tell you something strange and secret," she said confidentially. "Miss Redstone she go in a great hurry to fetch her niece. We go to Compiègne to the 'ouse of Madame Berne. There she find a young lady left all alone who fall into her embrace. She so pleased to see her! everyone in the 'ouse so pleased she come; everyone say, 'Poor young lady! it is good her kind aunt come,' and all the time *I* know it not her niece at all!"

"Lawks! What did she do when she found out the game? Handed the young woman over to the police, I suppose?" asked Johnnie, with somewhat languid interest, for he was never much excited by a story that had no direct bearing on his own affairs.

"But no! There was nothing like that, for Miss Redstone she do not find out; no one find out except me, and I say no word. Why should I? Mademoiselle Babette do not harm me! She stay over there still."

Johnnie sat up suddenly.

"What? Are you gammoning me, Tiny? Are you up to larks?"

She shook her head sadly. "Ah, no! I speak true to you. I am grown too old and 'eavy in my 'eart to what you call 'lark' any more."

She pressed her lean little brown hand to her heart as she spoke, but Johnnie was not thinking about her.

"What makes you say they've got a wrong un? It ain't likely, after all."

"I find it in a letter," Célestine explained; "Mademoiselle Babette she get two letters one day. I read both. She always leave all she has about her room. Mademoiselle Babette she act in a silly kind of way. If I should dare play such a trick I should be careful, but very, very careful. She is not careful! No more than if she had nothing to 'ide."

"But what was in the letters? Were they from pals? Is she a regular bad lot? Did you keep 'em, Tiny? I do 'ope you 'ad the sense to keep 'em?"

To his disgust she shook her head.

"Not me! It was not my affair! It interest me, *voilà tout*! One letter was from Sir Hubert Redstone (he who believes he is her grandfather); it say he is getting old, and want to see her soon. Mademoiselle Babette, she like him for a grandfather. It is not wonderful; he is beautiful and grand. The other was from one who is named Mary Ann Tavey. She was the friend of the mother of Mademoiselle Babette, and make dresses, but not in the better part. She write that Babette may come to live with her if she 'ave nothing else to do.

"My dear Barbara Anne Cole,' she say, 'I 'ope your pore step-papa 'as left you enough money to pay your way back to England' (or if it wasn't those words, it was what she meant); and 'I see in the news-sheet that your pore step-papa is dead,' she say, 'and you was always a clever child with your needle, so you can 'elp me with the dressmaking if you like,' she say. Mon Dieu! Miss Barbara will have better fun than to make ugly clothes for cheap prices in Bermondsey, hein?"

"I don't catch on," said Johnnie slowly. "Was Mary Anne Tavey in it? Was it a swindle they got up between 'em?"

Célestine shook her head. She had arrived at a curiously true perception of the situation.

"Mademoiselle Barbara, she did not sit herself down to make a—what do you call it?—*toile d'araignée*, but she find the threads in her fingers, and so she hold them."

"Now you're talking gibberish, and it ain't a subject for gibberish," said Johnnie firmly. "You just spit it out, Tiny."

"Miss Redstone, she take Miss Barbara for the child of her brother who died in the Berne 'Ouse. So they

all believe (except that I hear that just for a leetle there was a wicked whisper about 'er being someone picked up out of the street!) V'là! she is not of *that* kind. Nor she is not the poor dead gentleman's child, *non plus*. She is his step-child—as the letter say."

"Then she's no more business to live in Sir 'Ubert Redstone's 'ouse than I 'ave," said Johnnie. "Not unless they took 'er out of charity, which they didn't." He reflected a minute. "They'll kick 'er out pretty sharp when they gets to know."

"But they will nevair know—because I will nevair tell," said Célestine.

"If you 'ad just kept the letter, you'd 'ave 'ad more to go on. You were a duffer there. Why, there's pounds and pounds in this business, if it's true," he cried.

Célestine shivered. She wished now that she had never told Johnnie. She had very few illusions about him; she knew that he was quite as greedy as he was lazy. There was a gleam of aroused cupidity in his eyes now.

"Pounds and pounds and pounds!" he repeated slowly.

"I must go now; it is late already. Walk with me to the gate, Jahnnie—and do not tell what I haf told you."

"You may bet I won't do that in a hurry," said he thoughtfully.

As they walked down Holland Walk, he turned the queer bit of information over and over in his mind. It interested him to the exclusion of any thought of Célestine's other news.

"So long as we keep the secret it's ours," he said. "It don't do to let it out of the bag too quick. We must get its full value, that's what we must do. She must 'ave told a 'eap of lies, that young girl. I wonder what she's liable to get. I s'pose you couldn't anyhow catch 'old of that letter now?"

"No, I could not, and, more, I would not," said Célestine. "Cief, Jahnnie! You must believe me bad. To read a letter, dat is one thing; it is no harm.

Why leave it open in a drawer with no lock if you do not wish that one reads? It make life more amusing, and it do no hurt; but to try to make money from it for myself or for you, dat would be a great wickedness which passes me! I do it not!"

Johnnie regarded her with contempt.

"You 'ave the most muddle-headed ideas of anyone I ever met. I s'pose it's being French, and 'avin' a French conscience. Why, as a plain matter of fact, the wickedness is just in the opposite direction. As far as I make out, this girl's a right down imposter, pretendin' to be someone she isn't. She 'adn't ought to be allowed to flourish. If we put a spoke in 'er wheel, we're doin' just the proper, right, virtuous-like thing. See?"

"Then will you go now to tell to Sir Hubert what I just say to you?" asked Célestine sharply.

"What 'ud be the use of that, you silly? We must act calm and careful," said he. "What would we *get* by that? That's what we 'ave to look at, mind you."

"We would please our English conscience, hein?" said Célestine.

"Sometimes I fairly wonder 'ow stupid you can be!" said Johnnie impatiently.

Célestine laughed, but rather sadly. "Ah, mon Dieu, I sometimes wonder, too!" she said, "for yet I love you, Jahnnie!"

They parted at the iron gates, and she hurried home, but with a heart that was more leaden heavy than before she met him. She told herself that she had known all along that he would never help her, but sometimes she had tried feebly to persuade herself that she didn't know it—a foolish kind of self-deception, indeed.

## CHAPTER IV

BABETTE turned and tossed in her pretty new bed. It was luxuriously comfortable, but she was too excited to rest well. When at last her eyelids shut she dreamt of horrors; of walking long distances pursued by insistent duns (the poor child had been too often over-walked); of reaching a house which she believed to be an inn, and finding to her horror that a key turned in the lock so soon as she was inside, and that she was separated from her companion and shut into an airless prison all alone. The idea of death still haunted her, and she dreamed that there was a long narrow trench at her feet, which she realized with sick horror to be her own grave. In a wild desire to escape she struck at the wall near her bed with her hand, and so woke herself, to find the grey dawn filtering through the London haze, and gradually making all the dainty appointments of her room visible. It was going to be a hot day!

Babette was very pleased when Hannah made her appearance, carrying tea and bread-and-butter on a tray.

"Oh, Hannah, I'm so glad to see you! I've been having such dreadful dreams!" Babette cried.

She seemed small and immature as she sat up in bed, with her eyes wide open, and her ruffled hair in an aureole round her head. Hannah spoke to her in the comforting and reassuring tone she would have used to a child.

"Dear now, missy! I am sorry you have been having a nightmare. That was the late dinner after coming off the boat. I told cook she shouldn't send 'p dressed crab last night, for Miss Redstone she suffers

from indigestion, too, and never could resist crab, not from a child she couldn't. I expect you take after her there, missy."

"Do I? Do you think I am like my Aunt Julie?" asked Babette, and two mischievous dimples dimpled her cheeks.

"Well, no, missy, it's not her you take after most," said Hannah thoughtfully. "Oh, there isn't a doubt in my mind about who you favour. When we were talking last night in the room, miss, I says to Mr. Greyshott: 'I've lived many more years in the family than the rest of you, so I can tell you who the young lady is like. The others never knew my dear mistress, but I was here before Sir Hubert was left a widower. Your hair is just exactly the colour hers was when I first saw her, before it went white in her last illness. They may chatter of this or that, but I know what I am speaking about, for I am the one who remembers.'"

"Oh!" said Babette, "so I am really like——"

"Your grandmother, miss. Yes, that's whom you resemble," said Hannah firmly.

She put a shawl round Babette's shoulders, and a pillow at her back. Babette drank her tea out of a cup decorated with pink rosebuds, and ate a thin slice of bread-and-butter with relish. The nightmare of prison and grave receded into the dim distance.

"How very, very delicious it all is!" said she. "But I feel as if by rights *you* ought to be in bed and I waiting on you, Hannah! You are so much older than I am!"

Hannah stood stock still, the hot-water can in her hands, her pleasant face flushed with unwonted offence and hurt feeling. She was so taken aback that for a moment she could not speak.

"I'm not past work yet, miss," she said at last. "No one has so much as hinted such a thing to me before! Of course, if you would prefer a younger woman to wait on you, I've no doubt whatever that it can easily be arranged. I was never one to put myself forward in any way! I can't say that I think you will

be as well served, for the young ones don't put their hearts into service, but into outings and finery! But there, since you say I am so old as to be almost bed-ridden——"

"Oh, Hannah, *dear* Hannah! I never meant that," cried Babette in real dismay. "Why, I think you are so nice and comfortable. Ever so much nicer than Célestine! I was so glad when you came to help me dress last night! Hannah, you've got tears in your eyes! Put down that can and come here!"

Hannah approached the bed slowly. "Well, miss, I don't understand what you meant, if it wasn't that I am too old," she said.

Babette stretched out of bed, caught the old woman's sleeve and pulled her nearer.

"I'll tell you something," she said. "I'm not accustomed to being such a grand, petted, waited-on person, and I don't always know, say, or do the right sort of thing. I didn't just now, you see! But I shall learn—oh, I shall learn quickly, and you'll help me! If you were young and smart I should always be on my guard, and what a nuisance that would be, to be sure! As it is, I don't mind you a bit." She held Hannah fast, and nodded and smiled. "I never quite trusted Célestine, but I like you—I like you immensely, Hannah," said she.

"Oh, missy!" said Hannah, but relently, "that's not the way young ladies talk to their maids, neither. But there! with one like me, who has been thirty-seven years in the family, of course it's different; only I do beg and pray you not to speak so free with the others, missy."

"I never should! I am not so silly," said Babette shortly.

She finished dressing long before breakfast was ready, and presently made her way into the enchanted garden of the night before.

It was different by daylight. The trunks of the plane-trees had the curious blackness of London trunks, the foliage hung heavy in the still atmosphere.



One could see now that this was only a town garden, not more than half an acre in extent, though cleverly made the most of. When Babette had sat at the lighted dinner-table and peered into the shadows she had fancied that the grounds were quite large, but now she saw that there were houses all round. It seemed to her (fresh from walks in a forest) that there was something unnatural about the place. The very flowers did not look quite at home, but rather as if they had been lately transplanted (which probably was the case), and their stalks, and even their petals, were smutty; yet it was beautiful! Babette, who was sensitive to impressions, recognized that this enclosed, artificial little landscape was beautiful in a rather weird way. The darkened hue of the trees gave an impressive intensity of outline to the branches, which stood out against the soft melancholy background of mist. Two cats were prowling round with all the pose and mastery of movement which belongs to their species. Babette noticed that even the sparrows were a much darker hue than country sparrows, and how funnily cheeky they were! hopping quite close to her feet, cocking their little tails, taking dry shampoos on the sandy path, and eyeing her with quick, beady, inquisitive glances.

Babette sat at the top of the five steps that raised the terrace above the carefully planned garden, and, dropping her elbows on her knees and her chin on her hands, sniffed the smell of London, and, watching the sparrows, laughed softly. She often laughed when she was alone, being emphatically a person who could enjoy *herself*. Frank Graham, coming in at the garden gate, thought that never had he seen anything so pretty as that light figure perched between the stiff stucco vases full of red geraniums. Last time he had surprised Babette she had been crying bitterly; he rejoiced that now he found her laughing.

"Good-morning, Babette! Welcome home," he called out as he came towards her.

They had called each other by their Christian names

last year when Mr. Rothenstein had been alive, and they had gone for expeditions together through Fontainebleau Forest. He had determined to stick to the privilege.

"Thank you," said Babette. "Everyone welcomes me very kindly. But how is it that you are back in England already? You must have cut your walking tour very short!"

"It turned out rather a rotten business—that going for long walks," said Frank. "I wanted to get back. It's rough on the mater to see nothing of me during the 'Long.' I want to introduce you to the mater, so that you may make friends before you are all off. The Red-stones always cut the season short, and go early in July."

"But go where?" asked Babette.

"Oh, to their country diggings, you know."

He came and sat a step or two below her. His glance fell on her nicely shod feet. In the Fontainebleau days Babette's boots used to be patched and worn.

"Ah, yes, of course!" said she. "I remember that the rich people all went away in the summer. It wasn't a good plan for *us*! It made work scarce. One year, though, we got caretaking to do. That is one of the very first things I remember. I couldn't have been more than three years old, I am sure."

Frank Graham looked much surprised, and even slightly shocked. He knew that times had been hard, but he had not supposed that Mr. Rothenstein (as he had chosen to call himself) had ever been reduced to caretaking. Poor chap! how he must have loathed it!

"We were supposed to live in the basement, but I constantly managed to escape and find my way upstairs to the dining-room," continued Babette. "It was an enormous room—at least, it seemed so to me—and the carpets were all rolled up and the furniture stacked under white sheets, but I liked it even so. I used to pretend I was mistress of the house. I pinned a large dust cloth on to the hem of my frock to make a train, and I had some green glass beads that I wore in my

hair when I got there, and then I received guests. Queens and dukes, and lords and ladies—never anyone without a title! When Queen Victoria came I used to go to the door to meet her, and make a curtsy, and say, ‘Will your Majesty please to be seated?’ Mary Ann Tavey once told me that you might know the difference between real ladies and pretence ladies by their ways. The pretence ones would make themselves at home and sit down in your room without being asked, but the real ones never. The difficulty was that the chairs were all covered up, but Queen Victoria used to sit down on the air somehow. I suppose she was *such* a great lady that she managed to do the right thing anywhere.”

Frank Graham laughed.

“What a rum little article you must have been!”

“I cried myself sick when we had to leave because the family came home,” said Babette. “I haven’t thought about that house for years! I suppose being here has reminded me of it, but I don’t believe it was really as nice as this after all! The servants’ hall was dark, and there were a great many black beetles in the kitchen where mother and I lived.”

“Well, really! I must say that it was an awful shame,” said Frank. “Mr. Rothenstein should *not* have allowed you to live in a basement.”

Babette started, and flushed pink up to her forehead.

“You mustn’t say that! It wasn’t *his* fault! He had nothing to do with it—nothing whatever!” she cried.

“Then he ought to have had!” persisted Frank, who was still young enough to feel competent to lay down the law pretty freely. “It is manifestly absurd to say that a man had ‘nothing to do’ with what happened to his wife and daughter.”

Babette clenched her fingers and spoke with sudden passion.

“I won’t hear him blamed! If you blame him I will never speak to you again! I wish I had never told you so many sillinesses! I always talk too fast, and don’t

think enough about what I am saying ! But nothing that happened then was his fault, and if you don't believe that, I won't be friends with you any more !"

"Of course, that must be as you like," said Frank huffily. "But I cannot help seeing that you are extraordinarily unreasonable !"

They both sulked for half a minute. Babette had a very quick temper ; there was no doubt about that, he reflected. They had quarrelled once or twice during that bygone summer in France. It had always been her doing then, and he had always been entirely in the right, just as he was now !

Then the breakfast gong sounded, and Babette jumped up quickly.

"I must run in to breakfast ! English meals are so funny—and so serious !" said she, and smiled at him.

He thought her prettiest when she smiled ; her dimples always turned Frank's head.

"We must be friends, for I am your first and earliest friend, Babette," he cried.

"But no ! Indeed no !" said Miss Babette. "I have had plenty besides you ! For example, there was that podgy, fat boy at Fontainebleau who was always sending me sugar plums ; and there was the Italian who once spent a night under my window (he did truly) ; and there was the curate, and he was quite in earnest, but he was afraid of his sister, and she couldn't bear me ; and there was—oh, well ! I needn't count them all, but there were lots before you !"

She paused to laugh at some recollection, and her laugh was infectious.

Frank (albeit somewhat piqued) had some difficulty to refrain from laughing too.

"Oh, don't let's go on being cross ! It is such a dreadful waste," Babette cried. "Here we are on a summer day, in a lovely garden, with a nice breakfast ready for us (you haven't had yours yet, I suppose), with kind people who only want us to be pleased and contented, and with no horrid bills to pay ! Why, it's perfect ! How can we

be such idiots as to spoil one moment of such a lucky time by being dull! I am very sorry I was so angry! There!—but you see I was fond of him. I am still!”

“Yes, yes! I know! I was a brute to say a word against him to you,” Frank cried. “I never will again!”

So they made it up, and Frank went on his way whistling, and Babette ran into the house with a very bright face.

Really, it was all so delightfully pleasant! Frank Graham’s admiration put just the finishing touch to her pleasure. Babette had always liked talking to men. They gave her a sense of exhilaration, but in the old days she had felt herself handicapped. Her companion had developed her naturally critical qualities, and she had never taken to men who were not gentlemen, while she had yet been aware of her own disabilities—even a trifle bitterly. She knew she had no “dot.” Her step-father never saved a penny, even on his own account, and it would never have occurred to her to expect that he should do so on hers. She wasn’t a lady born, she had had no right even to be called “Miss Rothenstein,” though she had joyfully acquiesced in the arrangement. Her step-father had said it was “better so.” He meant to treat her as his daughter, and it simplified matters that she should bear the same name as himself. That had been part of his goodness to her! Poor Babette! She had always been so grateful to him! She had never in her life taken the “goodness” of her protector for granted, and as a matter of course. But now it was all different! She was not a little nobody now! She was Sir Hubert Redstone’s granddaughter. It was wonderful what a difference that made! Even Frank Graham’s manner had undergone a subtle change. He had always been what Babette called “very nice” to her, but he had been careful before. That had perhaps been part of his “niceness.” She had been quite an ineligious little person, whom it wasn’t “fair” to flirt with. But now? It was certainly great fun now. These stolen fruits tasted very sweet! Oh, very sweet indeed!

## CHAPTER V

BABETTE had been a fortnight in Sir Hubert's house when a family council was held. The three elders sat in consultation in the library while the little thing whose fate they were considering was sent out into the garden to cut a few trails of Virginia creeper.

Babette knew perfectly well what they were about. She peeped in at the library window once, and saw "Aunt Julie" talking and gesticulating eagerly, and Sir Hubert evidently agreeing with her. Mrs. Durnham saw her peep in, and frowned and shook her head at her, and Babette ran away. It was funny that she (who had so lately borne the burden of the day) should be treated as if she were an irresponsible child. The situation made her laugh, and then sigh.

"What should I have been like if I had really been born that grand old gentleman's grandchild?" she wondered. "I dare say I should have been quite good, then!"

Two, at least, of the three councillors found her quite good enough as it was, and discovered no faults in her. Before he had set eyes on her Sir Hubert had been full of the wisest plans for her education. He had quite agreed with Mrs. Durnham that it would be well to send Babette to a finishing school for at least a year, seeing that she had had a very irregular and unconventional upbringing. Now, however, his face clouded when this project was referred to.

"I must own I find the child charming," he said. "Why, after all, must we risk spoiling her?"

Miss Redstone supported him eagerly (it was at that moment that Babette had looked through the window).

"Yes, yes! That is exactly my feeling," she cried. "At present the dear little girl has such charm, such—how shall I express it?—such mystery. Now we all know that the English girl of to-day has neither one nor the other, and that is why she does not marry young. We do not want our wood-nymph, with her graceful, half-timid ways, and her fresh delight in everything, turned into a hockey-playing, conventionally slangy school-girl. Besides, what is education?" continued the good lady fluently. "If we consider, as I believe we should, that it is the drawing out of faculty, shall we not agree that my dear little niece has already been better educated in the open school of life than she would have been in an expensively select school for young ladies?"

"Very true—very true!" cried Sir Hubert delightedly. "What do you say, eh, Harriet?"

"I say that Julie can always produce clever reasons for following the course she wishes to follow," said Mrs. Durnham gravely. "And of course I understand that neither of you wish to send Babette away because you enjoy playing with her; but I do not think that you are wise. It is quite true that she has already had a great deal more experience of life than most girls of her age and of our class have; indeed, I sometimes think that she knows a great deal more than either you or Julie realize. But in some respects she is deplorably ignorant, and she needs discipline. She is so quick-witted and adaptable that she easily mimics the manners of society; but such mimicry is only skin deep. A year's schooling would be good for her, if only because you are both inclined to pet and indulge her to the top of her bent."

"Poor motherless darling!" cried Miss Redstone. "I must say that was a thoroughly unkind speech to all three of us."

Sir Hubert frowned, and paced up and down the room. He hated to be contradicted, but he had a sense of justice.

"No, Julie, you are not fair," he said. "I asked Harriet for her opinion. We have no right to say she is unkind because she gives it."

Mrs. Durnham seldom defended herself. She made no rejoinder to her sister, but went on working with outward calmness.

"For my part, I am convinced that any tenderness we can bestow on Babette is fully returned. Such an appreciative, grateful nature!" cried Miss Redstone.

Sir Hubert glanced from one daughter to the other. He had an uneasy respect for Harriet's seldom expressed judgments. She was never so fluent as Julie, but the fates had a disquieting way of proving her right in the long-run.

"I can't myself see where or how my granddaughter shows signs of being spoilt by our indulgence," said he. "I should have said with Julie that she is singularly appreciative and responsive."

"Oh yes, she is that," said Mrs. Durnham. "She enjoys luxury much as a half-starved kitten might enjoy a bowlful of cream. That is why I should not give her too much at once, if I were you. But I see that Julie thinks I am brutal, and that you must do as you choose."

"I will talk to Babette herself about it," said Sir Hubert.

"Ah, then, she won't be sent to school," said Mrs. Durnham, and, as a matter of fact, she wasn't.

But Sir Hubert hardly heard her comment.

"There are several things I want to talk to her about, but I must be gentle with her. I mustn't alarm her, or go too fast. I must always be ready to listen to her. I mustn't be overbearing," he admonished himself.

He was thinking about his dead son. Stephen's child at any rate should never have cause to say: "You wouldn't listen to me."

"I am going into the smoking-room. Send her to me there, Julie, and tell her that she is not on any account to be frightened of me," said he.

His daughters, to be sure, never had feared him in



the least ; he was one of the men who understood their girls better than their boys, or perhaps it is the other way about, and it is the girls who understand them.

Yet Babette was undoubtedly slightly nervous when she obeyed his summons.

The old man was sitting by the writing-table, but when she came into the room he got up quickly, because he remembered with a painful pang that he had been sitting in that chair during the last ill-starred interview with poor Stephen. He went across the room and took Babette's hand and led her to a high-backed settle that stood by the chimney-corner.

"You sit there," said he ; "that was one of the very first pieces of furniture that your grandmother and I bought for our first home. We had not much money in those days, and a thing that you save and pinch for is worth more to you than what you buy more easily afterwards. She was very pleased with it ; she would have liked to have seen you sitting there."

In his heart he believed that possibly his wife did see Stephen's child sitting there ! He had always had a fancy (it had deepened as he grew old) that she was sometimes in this room—but that was a fancy he would never have dreamed of speaking of to anyone. When he had quarrelled with his son he had felt in a curious, subconscious way, "Betty isn't pleased about this."

Babette had been naughtily amused when old Hannah had talked to her about her grandmother, but she had the grace to be ashamed now. She hung her head.

"I do not see that you are much like any of us," the old man continued, regarding her with bright kind eyes, "but your hair is the colour of my dear wife's hair. Oddly enough, none of my children took after her in that respect."

"No, no ! That isn't so ! My hair is like my own mother's hair, except that hers was a shade more red and brighter, and much more beautiful," Babette cried in a choked voice.

Sir Hubert took the protest rather sadly. It was

evident that she didn't like to be told that she resembled her grandmother! Stephen must have imbued her with a deep-rooted dislike of his own people. Poor Stephen! That was ill done of him! Well, he must have patience, great patience!

"I never saw your mother," he said gently. "I wanted to ask you to tell me something about her. How old were you when she died?"

"Getting on for twelve," said Babette. "Mother wouldn't have done very well here, I suppose," in rather a defiant voice. "She wasn't a lady, you know, but she would have worked her fingers to the bone for him or for me. When she was dying she said I was to be a good girl to him, and not give him any trouble, and save him all the bother I could. I—I did try. She was good. She came of Methodist people, and she used to take me to chapel sometimes—that was before she was ill."

"Was she ill long, my dear?"

He tried to remember which year it was that Stephen had written word that his wife was ill. If he had only told them that there was a child, Sir Hubert felt that he would have answered differently.

Babette shuddered. Her small face worked painfully. "Not very long—but *too* long. She had such dreadful pain. She used to stuff the bedclothes into her mouth so that he shouldn't hear her cry out. She said women had no business to make a noise over pain—but—but I'm not like that. I hate it! Why *must* we have it? She always said she was feeling better to him up to the very end."

Sir Hubert listened with deep attention. "I am sure your mother was a brave and good woman," he said. "It was our loss that we did not know her. Have you any relatives on her side?"

Babette shook her head.

"No—not that I know of. Mother's father and mother died long ago, before I was born. She told me so once. She said she was their only child, and she

broke their hearts. She said they kept her very strictly, but that they did it out of love. It was because she wouldn't let me play with the children in the street that she told me. She said *she* did it 'out of love,' too, but I didn't half believe her," Babette added remorsefully. "And her father's name was Jose," she went on. "He was a Cornish fisherman, and when she was a little girl she lived in a place where fuchsias grew like trees, by a sea that had colours like the eyes of a peacock's tail."

"She came of a good stock, then," said Sir Hubert. "I am glad that my daughter-in-law was country bred. I wish—but there is no use in wishing. Did Stephen—did my son ever speak to you of me, my dear?"

Babette thought for a moment. She longed to say "Yes" because she saw that he hankered after some message from the dead man, but she could recall no word. She shook her head sorrowfully.

"He wouldn't have been likely to," she said at last. "I am sure that he would never have talked about his family to me; he did not even to mother."

"I suppose not! I suppose not! We were quite cut off from each other," said the old man sadly.

Then he sat down on the settle beside Babette, and took her hands in his.

"I do not believe in keeping skeletons in cupboards; it is always better to air them," he said. "Your father never told you why he and I parted? Then I shall tell you. We parted because I was unforgiving and angry, because I would not listen to what he had to say, because I did not inspire any confidence in my son."

"Oh don't—don't say these things to me!" cried Babette. "You mustn't! I've no right whatever to listen to them!"

Her distress was so great and so evident that Sir Hubert was both surprised and touched by it. This, he felt, was a singularly tender nature. Julie was right—it was a nature that required most careful handling and guarding.

"I shall not say them again, granddaughter," said he

gravely, "but for this once I shall speak plainly, and you shall listen. I sinned, and now I have repented, for one is never too old to repent. When my poor son and I meet I mean to tell him that, though he had not enough confidence in me to write to me about you as he should have written, I yet have taken good care of his little girl. Now dry your eyes, and do not look sad over what I have told you. I thank God I have this chance! There are certain things that can never be undone, but the present is in our hands so long as any life at all remains to us."

Babette lifted her head, and looked at him with wonder. Indomitable youth smiled bravely from the old musician's eyes. Though he died at ninety he would yet die young, being beloved of the gods. This certainly was a spirit very unlike her stepfather's.

"But——" she began.

"There are no 'buts,' my child," said he firmly, albeit a trifle impatiently. "Even before I saw you, I was glad to hear of your existence! Now that we know each other I am doubly thankful! I don't intend to flatter or spoil you, Babette; I've no doubt you have plenty of faults" (this was prompted by a sudden recollection of his daughter Harriet), "but you certainly might be worse, Baby!" he added with a kindly laugh.

"Don't—you said that just like him (though you aren't *really* like), and I can't bear it!" said Babette.

Sir Hubert drew her to him and kissed her.

"That's enough of melancholy! I will not have an Undine for my granddaughter, anyhow!" said he with cheerful decision. "I wished to have you understand that I should have welcomed and respected your good mother had she been still alive. As for you, this is your natural home, and there can be no question whatever about your welcome! Now we have said all that was necessary, and we will never refer to those past affairs again. We will think of the future now. I should like to learn something of your tastes. Are you musical? Poor Stephen had a pretty little talent." He

sighed. "We'll make the most of *your* gifts, whatever they may be. How about a good finishing school? Would you like to be sent to the best we can find?"

"Not at all!" cried Babette in dismay. "Why, I am ever so much too old!"

Sir Hubert chuckled. "A great age truly! Much too old to learn any more, eh?"

"No!" said Babette. "But old enough to learn from you and from Aunt Julie. Don't send me away! I would really try very hard to please you all," she added pleadingly.

"Tch—tch—we *are* pleased; but your Aunt Harriet thinks you might benefit by school," said he. "For my part, I'm not so fond of school misses; but then perhaps you wouldn't grow into a school miss after all!"

A twinkle came into Babette's eyes.

"I should! If you were to send me to school I *certainly* should," she said. "I can always turn into something very easily! That is one of my chief points. I should be very school-missy indeed! He always used to say that I was a chameleon that caught the colour of what it lived on."

"In that case perhaps we had better not risk it," said Sir Hubert.

## CHAPTER VI

"WE'VE a few friends coming to us to-night, darling. Do you think you could sing one of your little French *chansons* to us?" Miss Redstone asked Babette one summer afternoon. She was more charmed with her niece than ever since she had discovered her musical talents.

Babette was arranging flowers. Among the many charms of this charming existence, flowers were perhaps the most exquisite. She looked round brightly.

"Oh yes, of course I could if you would like me to," she said, with the quick readiness to please that was characteristic of her, "but I am not sure that grand-dad's friends are not *too* musical to enjoy hearing me!"

"Do not be mock-modest," said Mrs. Durnham gravely.

She was the only person who ever reproved Babette, and the girl flashed into momentary mutiny.

"I'm not mock-modest, Aunt Harriet! I know that lots of people are kind enough to be pleased with me; but as to my singing, well, it isn't so bad, but *he* didn't think much of it! He said it was passable, if I kept within narrow limitations, and did not attempt anything beyond my scope. I certainly used to earn a little money by it sometimes, but he always told me that it was not so much my voice that attracted, as the fact that I was quite young, and looked so pathetic."

"Dear child!" murmured Miss Redstone, who always listened to these revelations with mingled interest and wonder. "I've no doubt you looked perfectly sweet, and you have the dearest little voice too!"

"I look much sweeter now that I can wear pretty dresses, and am never overtired, than I did then!" said Babette. "Sometimes I do so wish he could see me now! He would laugh; but he would be pleased too! Of course, in one way, it used to be much more necessary that I should make a good impression on strangers." She sighed retrospectively. "It mattered practically then! If I am a disappointment to-night, I shall be sorry because I want you and grand-dad to feel that I don't discredit you. I want it very, very much! But still we shan't go to bed hungry because I fail. We shall not even have one dish the less!"

Miss Redstone laughed.

"You funny little thing, of course not!" But Mrs. Durnham's silent reception of the "funny" speech was tinged with suspicion. It seemed to her that Babette had a thoroughly commercial mind, that she appraised even her own youthful charms (such as they were, and they were surely overrated) at a coarse market-value, that in fact she was a very dangerous specimen of the genus "minx."

As for Babette, the culminating pleasure of many pleasure-filled days was reached that evening. She was a success, and she knew it! The little circle of finely critical people who gathered at the Redstones' approved of her.

Miss Dupins (who had resigned her place as Principal of the Lady Jane Grey College) was there, and Frank Graham with his pretty mother, and the Leslies—a father and two charming daughters who lived in Old Kensington Square, and a dozen or two others, all more or less on a friendly footing in that hospitable house.

Babette had said quite truly that she wished to do Sir Hubert credit; she was fast becoming very fond of him; she also very much liked admiration on her own account; her vanity had been put on a generous diet of corn and beans lately. Nearly everyone combined to pet her! Nearly—there were just one or two dissenters. Babette was piqued and put on her mettle by dis-

approval; she did not sink under it as some people do. When a man was antagonistic (but that, to be sure, hardly ever occurred) she instinctively tried to bring him to her feet; when it was a woman a spark of mischief was aroused in her.

Frank Graham was openly adoring; Mrs. Graham was sparkling and gay; but the girl felt as if there were a glint of something steely hard behind the little lady's society manners.

Mrs. Graham was slight and fair, and it was generally said that she was absurdly young to be the mother of a grown-up son.

"Frank's mother has the most young-looking body and the oldest soul of anyone I've ever met!" Babette remarked in a rash aside to Miss Redstone.

Miss Redstone laughed and said: "How naughty of you—but how true! It is just what I feel about Jessie."

She had never felt anything of the sort, and yet it was true that a very wary expression did at times glance out of Mrs. Graham's eyes—the expression of someone who has seen very bad things happen, and means never again to be taken by surprise.

"She doesn't like me!" added Babette quickly, and then her glance was caught by Miss Dupins, who smiled at her from the other end of the room, and she fluttered across to her.

Miss Dupins loved girls, though she did not always understand the butterfly type, being far more accustomed to the strenuous students. Babette had been rather alarmed by the tall lady with the almost ascetically plain black gown and the quiet manner. She felt somehow that Miss Dupins represented a point of view that was the very antithesis of her own. She stood for plain living and high thinking, and sexless comradeship, but the smile attracted her.

"I went to Madame Berne's pension just after you left," Miss Dupins said. "I heard so much about you from everyone! It was very interesting to know that you were the grandchild of my old friend Sir Hubert.



Madame Berne told me that when I met you I was to give you her love, if you cared to have it."

"Of course I care to have it! Madame Berne was so kind," Babette said warmly. "I think she is one of the very kindest people I ever came across. I think that usually men are so much kinder than women," she added naïvely.

Miss Dupins looked amused, and there the conversation ended, for the girl was much in request, and Sir Hubert touchingly eager to display his grandchild to all his old cronies. He accompanied her on the piano when she sang, and the two made a pretty enough pair.

Babette's light figure in its filmy black gown had an air of fragility that was yet unmarred by any suggestion of ill-health. When she sang she swayed slightly as a bird sways on its branch. Her fingers just touched each other lightly, but she made no grimaces, and her pronunciation was singularly distinct. She had been carefully trained, but her notes seemed to bubble up spontaneously. Her curious dark-green eyes shone under the straight pencilled brows; just a tinge of clear pink came into her usually pale face. Everyone cried that she was charming, absolutely charming. One really forgot that she had scarcely any voice at all. Sir Hubert was aware of that fact; but it did not prevent his being very proud of her. She had distinction, both of style and manner. When he thought of the granddaughter he might have had—pert, bouncing, ill-bred—he felt truly grateful to her. He greatly enjoyed the congratulations of his friends; he felt they were genuine, although he playfully disparaged his new-found treasure, while in his heart believing it to be all, and more than all, it was declared to be.

"A little ignorant baggage!" said he. "She can't play hockey; she can't talk on platforms; she's never been to a ball! She can't so much as teach her own grandfather to suck eggs, as they all can nowadays!

*I don't know who'll think anything of her! Why, she hasn't even a good, sensible name—eh, Baby?"*

Something in those last words made Babette start momentarily; for a second she looked askance at him. Sir Hubert, who was as sensitive as a woman to other people's feelings, felt as if he had hurt her.

"Why, my dear, I was only in joke! You know that," he whispered to her.

"Yes, yes, grand-dad," she whispered back. "And I think Babette is a very nice name! It is better to be nice than to be good or sensible," she added laughing.

Then he twisted round on the music-stool, and struck the first notes of a little song he had himself composed for her; she sang it better than she sang any of the others. The musical sympathy between them was a great bond and joy.

Siegfried Durnham saw her for the first time as she stood swaying and singing by her grandfather's side. He stood in the doorway and watched her till she had finished. So this was the new cousin about whom every member of his family had written him letters. She was not in the least like what any of them had described, he considered, though, indeed, none of their descriptions tallied. It even occurred to him that she was not in the least like anyone whom he had ever met. The evident joy she had in singing reminded him of a bird's joy. Somehow it touched him, though he was not supposed to be a susceptible person. He was fond of birds—indeed, he had a great tenderness for all kinds of small wild creatures. His eyes smiled as he looked at her. Siegfried's eyes always smiled first, before his lips, and they were very kindly in expression, though quite unremarkable as to colour and shape.

Babette was disappointed in him when he was introduced to her at the end of the song. She had hoped for something more interesting. No one, she felt, could call Siegfried anything but commonplace. He was barely of medium height (not quite so tall as his stately mother); he had a good-tempered expression, and sandy

hair and moustache. He was not ugly, for he was clean complexioned and wholesome, but then ugly men are sometimes impressive, whereas it is doubtful if anyone had ever looked twice at Siegfried in a crowd.

He held out his hand to her with ready friendliness.

"How do you do, Babette?" said he, for he had made up his mind that, since they were first cousins, he would call her by her Christian name at once, without more ado.

Someone standing by him spoke enthusiastically of Babette's rendering of the song.

"It touched me—really touched me! It had such pathos and quality! It was a real treat."

Babette (who for the life of her could never refrain from trying to discover what a new-comer thought of her) raised her eyes to Siegfried's, to meet a twinkle of fun.

"Are you fond of music?" she asked demurely.

Siegfried smiled broadly at the question.

"Lord, no!" said he. "I know 'God save the King,' and, I believe, I can usually spot the Dead March in 'Saul' because of the boom of drums in it, but that's all! If you were to sing that song of yours all over again to-morrow, I should never know I had heard it before. Not but what I am sure it was most awfully jolly," he added kindly.

Babette laughed merrily.

Even though her vanity had been somewhat overfed of late, even though, to use Mrs. Durnham's simile, a starved kitten had been presented with a bowlful of cream, yet she preserved her saving sense of humour, and Siegfried felt that her laughter was delightful.

"How jolly it is that you have come to live with us," he said heartily.

His vocabulary was limited; as his Aunt Julie often remarked, he worked one adjective hard, and made it stand for various emotions.

Babette responded with grateful and quick readiness.

"I should just think so!" said she. "You are very

kind to say that; but you haven't the faintest idea of how *very* 'jolly' all this is to me."

She did not sing any more after that, but just enjoyed herself radiantly.

Everyone made much of her. Frank Graham was evidently desperately in love; the girl was like a new-crowned queen holding the sceptre of her youth and grace, and most admiring of all her courtiers were those of her own immediate circle, Sir Hubert and Miss Redstone.

Sir Hubert had that evening given to her the first bit of jewellery that she had ever possessed. It was an opal pendant—three stones set in a trefoil, which hung round her neck by a slender chain. The softly changing hues of the gems, the sunset pink, the blue like the blue on a pigeon's breast, the green like the pure green of a flame, seemed typical of life just then—all so full of colour, all so new and beautiful! She showed it to Siegfried, who duly admired it.

"I am glad I am not a young man," she cried gaily. "For if I were I couldn't wear pretty things!"

"No; but you could look at them, and that's much jollier," said Siegfried. No compliment was intended.

When the party was over Babette ran up to her room, humming as she ran. When she had unfastened her chain, she kissed her opals with childish pleasure in their beauty, and laid them very tenderly in cotton-wool. Then she carelessly opened a letter that had come by the late post. There had been a time when letters had meant that tiresome, insistent people wanted their accounts paid. What a mercy to reflect that there were no bills owing now, or that even if there were, Sir Hubert would never think twice about settling them! She read the letter, and jumped as if she had put her hand on a horny snake.

"MADAM,

"I know your secret, but am not one who desires to injure a young lady, nor to spoil her chance in life.

You need have no fears if you will likewise show a proper consideration and feeling for one in misfortune. A reasonable sum (say £20) sent to

“X002,

“The Post-Office,

“Commercial Road,

will insure my respectful and complete silence for ever.

“ONE WHO KNOWS.”

Babette's fingers clenched, and she bit her lips as she read this precious document. She was disgusted, startled, and angry. Who dared to do this horrible thing? Who dared reach towards her with dirty, clutching hands? “How I loathe you!” she cried, and tore the bit of paper viciously into small pieces.

She collected the scraps into a heap in her candlestick and set light to them, watching them shrivel into thin black ashes, and then crushing the remains into powder between her fingers.

“I wish I could do as much to the beast who sent you!” she cried between her teeth; and then she began to wonder who that beast could be.

Her meditations were interrupted by Miss Redstone, who had a way of invading her bedroom at all hours.

“Dearest,” said that lady, “how charmingly you sang your dear grand-dad's song! What a true joy you are to all of us! Ah, I know someone admired you very much! Poor fellow! I always liked Frank, though Harriet says he is unstable.”

“I am so glad you were pleased, Aunt Julie,” said Babette, but she spoke wearily.

“You are tired, my pet. You have the artistic temperament like myself. You become suddenly exhausted. I know the sensation full well,” said Miss Redstone, sighing. “Your grandfather is just the same; we all are like that—with the exception of poor dear Siegfried.”

“I like Siegfried. There's something nice and funny about him,” said Babette, but she spoke absently; she

was still sifting powdered ashes between her finger and thumb.

"Oh, he's a good boy," said Siegfried's aunt disparagingly; "no ambition, no intuition! He cannot help his limitations, of course; but he is as steady and worthy as can be."

"Aunt Julie, you say I am a true joy to you all," said Babette abruptly. "Now, do you truly think that I am worth all I cost? Because you see anyone who lives in the sort of way we live here does cost quite a lot! No one could get boarded and lodged in this style under some hundreds a year." Babette cast an appreciative glance round her room as she spoke.

Now this, Miss Redstone felt, was just one of those remarks that her sister dubbed "commercial." She usually laughed when Babette spoke in that tone, but to-night she felt jarred.

"Really, dear child," said she a trifle tartly, "you must get rid of that stupid habit of totting up the 'worth' of things in such materialistic fashion. Tangible possessions are the least valuable possessions in life."

Utter scepticism peeped out for a moment between Babette's black eyelashes.

So that was all Aunt Julie knew about it—Aunt Julie who had never gone to bed hungry in her life nor been kept awake by the threats of duns! But how had she better meet this danger? Who was the sinister creature who was ready to sell his "respectful silence" for the consideration of twenty pounds?

That question sat on Babette's pillow and effectually chased away sleep, till suddenly an idea came to her. Could it be Mary Anne Tavey?

If so she would send no money—no, not a penny! but she would go herself to parley with the enemy. She would know better then where she stood, and how to act.

Poor Babette! She felt that night as if enemies and despoilers lurked and lay in ambush for her. No doubt the real fact of the matter was that *she* was the robber! Who sows a lie reaps terror and confusion; but she

hardly recognized herself as a thief. On the contrary, it seemed to her that the shelter and comfort that she so thoroughly enjoyed ought to be hers—ought to be every girl's!

"And, after all, I do please them; I believe I am worth my keep," she assured herself rather pathetically.

"I suppose, if they knew all, they would turn me out directly; but who would be the better off for that? Not grand-dad; he'd miss me horribly. Not Aunt Julie; one can see that she's never so happy as when she has got someone to patronize!" (Already Babette thought of them by the names by which she called them.) "Not their friends, for I never harm any of them; nor the servants, for they love me! And where should I go, and what would become of me?"

She shuddered. To her Independence was a plain and lonely jade, and Poverty a hostile and dangerous foe.

"I should become worn out with hard, dull work, and there would be nothing pretty or nice left about me," she reflected; for, in spite of her many strange experiences, she had preserved a certain inborn purity, and there were some dangers which did not, after all, occur to her as possible.

## CHAPTER VII

MISS TAVEY had lived for many years in a two-storied house in Bermondsey. A card hung in her window, on which was written :

“Miss Mary Anne Tavey. Dressmaker. Nurses’ Uniforms a speciality.”

The card was attached to a bird-cage, and swung alluringly to and fro, as her canary hopped up and down. Miss Tavey had the top floor, which consisted of a front and a back room, and a tiny cupboard of a place which she sublet to a gentleman lodger.

The O’Gradys, who occupied the ground floor, looked upon Miss Tavey as a person of almost aggressive wealth. They slept five in a room (not counting the latest baby), and Mrs. O’Grady sometimes remarked that “it seemed quare to her how one single body could contrive to take up all that great space to herself.”

Miss Tavey disapproved of her neighbours root and branch—of their nationality, of their religion (they were Roman Catholics), of the improvident number of children they had, of the way they shouted and laughed when they were merry, and of the way they howled and lamented when the world went wrong with them.

During the course of the last fifteen years or so, she had frequently said that she was thinking of making a move, in order that she might be among respectable persons of her own class ; but she never got further than thinking, and it is probable that she derived a certain satisfaction from shocked disapproval which counter-balanced the discomfort of untidy neighbours.

Miss Tavey was a meagre little woman, who bore all



over her body the traces of hard toil. She walked slightly crookedly from rheumatism, and her pale blue eyes were red-rimmed and strained from too assiduous sewing. Her hair was drawn tightly back from her forehead, and brushed so smooth that it looked as if it had been ironed. It had once been fair, but Mary Anne cared so little for appearance, except in so far as tidyness was concerned, that she had hardly noticed when it turned iron-grey. She had lost her teeth, but had never made up her mind to throw away money on a dentist. Her hands were thin and small, but full of vigour. Her forefinger was roughened where her busy needle had constantly pricked. She was an ungracious but intrepid figure. *One who could be clean in the midst of dirt,* orderly in the midst of disorder, self-supporting and independent in the midst of shiftlessness. She could be generous too, but comparatively few people knew that. Babette's mother, Barbara Cole, had been one of the few. Mary Anne Tavey had been a steady friend to her, according to such lights as she had. She despised men (the friendship did not extend to Jethro), but she loved Barbara with the protecting and loyal love that plain women so often give to their more attractive sisters.

Miss Tavey and Mrs. Cole had both been brought up as Baptists, and had both originally come from country stock, though Mary Anne Tavey was from the north, and Barbara Cole from the extreme south, of England.

Mrs. Cole was very young when she married—a slip of a girl with a pretty figure (she was taller than Babette by an inch), and the dazzling pink and white colour that goes with auburn hair; an impulsive, passionate, beautiful creature, who had married in haste, poor soul, and who certainly lived to repent.

Miss Tavey was always on her side devotedly and indignantly. Jethro drank, and Barbara was angry and miserable. She was no saint, and she had been a much beloved, much petted only child. She resented unhappiness and the cause of it. She had no idea of managing anyone.

There was a time of storm and stress and quarrels and heart-breaks. Her baby was born into a most unpeaceful atmosphere, but at a wonderfully early age developed a faculty for evading shipwreck and paddling her own little canoe.

"The cunningest little creature!" Mary Anne Tavey would declare admiringly. "Why, even her daddy can't say no to her, when he's sober; and when he's drunk the way she'll keep out of his way shows what a deal more sense she has at four than her mother at twenty-four!"

For though she loved Barbara, Mary Anne had no opinion of her sense. When Jethro finally deserted his wife and child, Mary Anne considered the desertion a matter for congratulation, and had small patience with her friend's fits of melancholy and remorse.

"It's the best thing he's ever done for you," said she. "For when a man once takes to drink he doesn't mend. You couldn't have pulled him up, but he could have dragged you down. He is better than some, for he's let you go."

They heard no more of Jethro Cole for two or three months, then news of his death reached Mrs. Cole in a letter from an old chum, who had been in the same regiment with him before his marriage. Jethro had served three years in the army, and had been in the band, being a person of parts, till he muddled them away in beer. It appeared he'd had a sunstroke in Paris, where he'd got an "odd job" on the railway, and where he had fallen in again with the writer of the letter. He had been taken to a hospital, but had died the same evening. The friend described his death rather graphically, and sent his last words to the widow: "She was to be sure to pluck up, and make the best of the game, and thank the Lord she was rid of him."

Mary Anne Tavey fulfilled the last part of the injunction with a stout heart. Her point of view was not sympathetic, but she was practically helpful, and it was largely owing to her strenuous efforts that mother and

child kept out of the workhouse and held up their heads.

Poor Mary Anne! She toiled hard for them, and so far as could be seen her reward was somewhat scanty; for Barbara Cole was not meant for single blessedness; the masculine element was bound to invade her life again sooner or later; and this time the man was above her in station, and he carried her right out of Mary Anne's ken.

"Some women is so constructed that they must have a man about 'em or pine. I thank Providence that *I* wasn't made so," the good woman said with half-contemptuous tolerance.

"A kind, soft-handed sort he is too, but quite the gentleman."

That last fact impressed and pleased her, and when she heard that "the soft-handed sort" drew an allowance of £150 a year without "having to turn a hair for it," she was grimly contented with the situation, and acquiesced stoically in her own loss. The broken-down gentleman might consider the pittance "barely enough to exist on," but to Mary Anne Tavey, and to Barbara Cole, it meant riches. Not that it was the riches that appealed to Barbara; it was rather the man's gentle ways, his half-humorous ineptitude for roughing it, and his entire freedom from the coarser vices. His life had been a failure; he mocked playfully at it, at himself, and at the world in general; but to Barbara and to Barbara's child he was a benefactor to be repaid by loyal love, an uncrowned king who could not be served too well.

When the second marriage was fairly accomplished, and Barbara and the little girl disappeared out of reach of Mary Anne's faithful and grumpy protection, Mary Anne came perilously near pining herself. Her pride came to her aid, for had she not always said "Every pot should stand on its own bottom"? But she missed them sorely. She became rather sour as the years went by (especially after she heard of Barbara's death), and she aged before her time. It was quite an old

woman who stood on a pail in a back-yard in Bermondsey one summer morning, and never guessed that someone was coming along the street who would soon knock at the door of her heart !

"One return to Spa Road," said Babette.

She stood at the ticket-office of the Metropolitan Railway, and as she put down her pence she wished fervently that the day's business were done, and that she was already on her return journey.

Babette had the natural love of adventure befitting her age, but she foresaw that this would be an unpleasant enterprise from first to last. There was nothing nice about it.

With some difficulty, and on the plea of a headache, she had escaped being taken out by Miss Redstone. She disliked being disobliging, and she had the grace to be somewhat ashamed of her excuses. She hated the Metropolitan Railway; she hated the poorer parts of London, and she hated being hustled. She laughed rather bitterly at her own discomfort. It was funny that she should so quickly have got into a habit of doing everything in the most protected and comfortable way possible.

The train happened to be crowded. A guard with an impatient "Now then, do be sharp, miss," shoved her into a carriage. A man got up to make room for her; she turned to thank him, and to her chagrin recognized Siegfried.

Siegfried hung on to a strap and looked down at her with his disarmingly honest smile.

"I say, I don't call this the place in which to get rid of a headache," said he; and Babette was so disconcerted by the meeting that her ready tongue failed her, and she made no reply.

Her head had scarcely ached at all when she pleaded headache as a reason for not paying calls with her Aunt Julie, but she felt that it was part of the irony of life that it was really paying her out now. She had not slept, and the swing of the train made her feel very

sick. Her temples throbbed, and she was helplessly aware that she had got into a quandary. Siegfried was stupid, of course, but surely even he must see that something was wrong.

"Why, you've dropped your ticket," said he.

He picked it up for her, and glanced at it as he did so.

"Spa Road! Why, that's where I am bound for. How funny that we should both be going there this afternoon!" he remarked cheerfully.

Babette did not think the untoward circumstance held much fun for her in it. She could have wept with vexation. People got out at the next station, and her cousin sat down by her side.

"I've promised to help a friend who is taking some natural history classes at the Bermondsey Settlement. Do you care about that sort of thing?" he asked.

"No; not in the least. I don't like people who go about trying to do good to other people. I think they are dreadfully annoying!" said Babette.

"I meant, did you care about natural history?" Siegfried explained, with unabashed good temper. "It's so awfully jolly, you know, that when you've once seen things you can't help wanting to show other people."

"Oh, I see! How 'thick' I was just now!" cried Babette. She turned to him with the quick interest and friendliness that came naturally to her. "No; I know no more about natural history than you know about music, but I suppose you do find it very exciting. Tell me more about it, please."

For the moment she really forgot about the dangers lying in wait for her, and they chatted pleasantly for a few minutes.

Then, as they neared Spa Road, all her anxieties returned. She had not intended anyone to know of this expedition. Suppose Siegfried talked about their encounter when they got home? What should she say then? She couldn't think, for with the anxiety the feeling of physical misery returned.

"Look here. I am going to walk with you to where-

ever you are going," Siegfried said calmly, "because you have turned perfectly green, and I don't believe you are fit to go by yourself."

"Oh no, don't! I don't want you! I am all right. It's nothing," cried Babette.

Could anything be more unlucky? When the train stopped at Spa Road her head swam so that she could not have walked to the sliding-doors without his steady hand on her elbow. In the midst of her most unromantic distress the thought flashed across her mind that she was glad anyhow that Siegfried was not Frank Graham. She really could not have borne to have had Frank Graham looking at her when she had turned "perfectly green."

They went up the dirty steps together, and when they emerged from the station, Siegfried stuck to her side.

"These aren't the sort of streets for you to go fainting about in. I had rather see you safe," said he. "You needn't talk to me, you know."

Poor Babette stood stock-still, and regarded him with dismay. He was afraid she was about to cry, but to his relief she laughed instead.

"If you insist on coming with me, you will have to be a conspirator," she said. "I don't want anyone at home to know where I've been this afternoon. Will you promise you won't tell?"

"Of course I won't tell. Why on earth should I? Which way do we go?" said Siegfried.

"To Friday Street. I don't remember the way. I shall have to ask someone to direct us."

"You need only ask me. I know Friday Street quite well. Come along," said he.

They walked in silence through several broad, dull streets. Babette wished to prepare herself for the approaching interview with the "one who knew," but she could not for the life of her concentrate her attention.

She kept peeping at her companion. She wanted so much to learn what was passing in his mind. Of

course, it must strike him that her behaviour had been odd. How silly she had been! It would have been far wiser to have given up her object for the time, and to have gone straight back. No one's suspicions need have been aroused if she had managed properly. She was feeling better now. If only her nerves had not played her false.

"Well, what *are* you thinking about?" she said at last.

"That I am not certain that I corked that small green bottle securely. It has got water from a stagnant pond in Sussex in it. I do trust nothing has escaped," said Siegfried anxiously.

He never intended to snub anyone; but what other young man of Babette's acquaintance would have been absorbed by the thought of stagnant ditch-water while walking with her?

The girl looked hard at him for a moment, and then laughed. He smiled at the sound, though not comprehending its cause. Her charming, low, gurgling laugh had a note in it that reminded him delightfully of the wild note of a bullfinch.

They had reached Friday Street now. It was a side street not by any means obtrusively slummy, but most horribly drab-coloured and dingy. The houses were two-storied, but many of them had coarse Nottingham lace curtains in the front windows. A kind of specious primness veiled its poverty. It occurred to Siegfried that Babette was the only pretty object to be seen in it, and rather noticeable.

"Shall you be all right if I leave you here?" he asked doubtfully.

"Yes, yes! I have friends here," said Babette. Then she coloured. "That is, not exactly friends"—with a recollection of that horrible letter—"but someone who was once a friend of my mother's lives here. My mother was quite a poor woman, you know."

The last sentence came out with a note of half-frightened defiance.

Siegfried nodded.

"Oh, well, that's all right. Is this the number? See you again at dinner; good-bye," he said, and so left her.

The front-door stood ajar, because the day was warm. You could see right through the house to the yard at the back, where Mary Anne Tavey was hanging her washing on a line.

Mary Anne shared the yard, as well as the house, with the Irish family. Their washing was never so tidy as hers, nor was it ever so securely fixed. They did nothing firmly or securely. Their clothes (there were strange masculine garments amongst them, which Mary Anne eyed with disfavour) were always full of holes, of flimsy material, and flamboyant colours.

Mary Anne Tavey was not thinking about her dead friend or about Babette as she hung up her petticoat and stockings, but yet, when she heard a voice ask a question of Mrs. O'Grady, who had gone to the door, a vision of poor Barbara Cole rose unbidden before her mind's eye. She finished pegging, and then went through to the front.

"I am Miss Tavey, if you are inquiring for me. Have you come about the dressmaking?" said she.

The girl who stood in the doorway looked at her rather oddly, as if she were trying to see through a mist. Indeed, Babette was looking backwards through the mist of years.

"It is such a long time—such a very long time—since I saw you last," she said. "I don't suppose you recognize me; of course you can't, but——"

"Yes, I do. You are Barbara Cole's girl," said the old woman.

For a second she could say no more. The muscles of her thin throat worked convulsively; she put her long bony little hands before her mouth to hide its quivering. Then, "You are kindly welcome. Come in and take a seat," said she. "Me and your mother was friends."



## CHAPTER VIII

BABETTE followed Mary Anne up a poky staircase into a perfectly clean and tidy room.

The canary's cage hung in the window; there was a gay and elaborate patchwork quilt over Mary Anne's bed (it was a couch in the daytime), and there were china ornaments on the mantelpiece. Crotchet mats with fringes were dotted about everywhere, and fashion plates were pinned against the walls. An armchair with patchwork cushions stood in front of a fireplace, decorated with a green and white ornament of cut paper. Babette blushed for shame as she breathed the intense respectability of Mary Anne's home. This was not the woman to write a blackmailing letter. There was no need to question her.

"I should never have come here. I am quite on the wrong tack. What an idiot! Oh, what an idiot you are, Babette!" the girl cried passionately to her foolish self.

Mary Ann was looking her over, from the feather in her hat to the shoes on her feet.

"Well, to be sure, Barbara, you're dressed quite the lady," she observed with a sniff, which was partly due to emotion. "Your own mother wouldn't hardly know you. I am sure I don't know how I came to be so positive, but it came over me in a flash. 'It's her gurl as stands there;' not that you're much like her, after all."

"Mother was much bigger than I am," said Babette.

"*She* was a beauty, though beauty is deceitful and of no account," said Mary Anne. "A fine figure of a

woman poor Barbara was, and her eyes as true blue as sapphires."

She spoke with tender pride. Babette felt that her own greenish eyes and immature figure showed a terrible falling off from the maternal standard.

"Of course I remember my mother well, but I never thought about whether she was good-looking or no," said she.

"She didn't get such fine feathers to set her off—leastways not when she lived with me," said Mary Anne, with another sniff. She had been reckoning just how much Babette's clothes must have cost. That ostrich tip alone was worth a pretty penny!

"My grandfather—Sir Hubert Redstone, I mean—likes to see me nicely dressed. He is most generous to me," said Babette. Then she smiled at the old woman, and her dignity suddenly melted. "You were very fond of mother, weren't you?" she cried; "so you'll be glad that I have a happy home, and that everyone is nice and kind to me."

"Fond! I don't know about fondness. I was never soft," said Mary Anne severely. "Too much softness is the undoing of women;" but she looked reluctantly at Babette. "There—you sit down here, my dear. I'm glad to see you, anyhow."

She pulled forward the cushioned chair for Babette, and sat down herself by the window, and took up her work.

"You'll excuse my sewing? I ain't a lady, and I can't afford to fold my 'ands on my lap while the light lasts." The canary fluttered against the bars of his cage as she came near to him, and she chirruped to him as she sat down. "You've got fine feathers, too—yes, you 'ave indeed, my pretty!" she said; then glanced again at her visitor. "Grandfather, eh? Gracious me! there's a rise in life for poor Barbara's girl. But there, I don't begrudge it you! I'm pleased enough to hear you've fallen on your feet, and I must say I take it handsome of you to come to tell me of

your luck. I've thought a deal of you, Barbara. When I saw that your step-papa was dead, I couldn't sleep a wink for thinking, nor rest till I'd written to you. When I got yours in return, it did come rather like a slap on the face—a bit 'igh and 'aughty, as if you'd quite forgot Mary Anne."

Babette blushed again, as well she might. She lived very much in the present, and for a time the recollection of Mary Anne had been mislaid or overlaid, but she seldom mistook character when she was face to face with anyone.

"To tell the truth, I believe I *had* forgotten what you were like. I'm very sorry, Miss Tavey," said she, with disarming frankness. "Now that I see you again, I begin to remember all kinds of things. Did I not sleep in this very room once? Did I not cut out lovely paper ladies while I was sitting up in my bed?"

"You did. To think of that coming back to you!" cried Mary Anne. "Quick with your fingers you always were. A very sharp child, too. You was like your own father there, for, when not muddled with drink, there never was a neater-fingered man than Jethro Cole. Yes, you stayed with me once for a good three weeks, when you was about four years old. It arose from your getting between Jethro's legs as he came up the stone stairs of the buildings. He wasn't quite himself at the moment, and he kicked out, and you fell down the stairs and hit the side of your head against a sharp corner. It wasn't like you to have got in his way, for, though you was so small, you was a wonderful cunning little thing for hiding if there was any sort of a rumpus going on, and for looking after yourself. Your head had to be sewn up, and the accident seemed to make you scary and nervous-like for a bit; that was why I took you in here. The doctor said you should be kept quiet, but Barbara never held with sending her own flesh and blood to the hospital, and you can't have much quiet where there's a man messing round. I never was a great one for children, but you were quite

amusing company for me. Yes, you had my bed, and I slept on two chairs, and you sat up and cut out fashion plates as content as could be. I never did see such bits of fingers so handy. That was why I fancied that you might have taken to dressmaking when you grew up, but of course you're better off as it is."

Babette listened attentively. She disliked these reminiscences, and yet they had a kind of horrible fascination for her.

"You was that proud of your bandages!" Mary Anne continued, with a chuckle. "It was a queer thing, but your mother, who was downright beautiful, never gave two thoughts to her looks; but you, with your cropped hair and sharp little, wedge-shaped face, you was the vainest little article, always craving to be noticed! When the doctor came you was as pleased as Punch, and full of importance. 'My daddy did this. He kicked me downstairs 'cos I got in his way!' says you. 'He's a great big strong fierce feller is my daddy. Stronger and fiercer than other gals' daddies, ain't he?' says you. Barbara was angry when she heard what you said. She called you a mean little cat for telling tales of your own father, and she'd have spanked you for it if you hadn't been ill; but I believe myself you thought it was a kind of feather in your cap you was sporting."

Babette frowned, and involuntarily put her hand up to her left temple, where the scar of the cut still remained.

"My stepfather was a father to me—I don't care to think about that other. He is much better forgotten," she said.

"Well, he didn't deserve you should be fond of him, and so I told him," said Mary Anne. "He came in here one day when you was still in bed, and tried to make friends with you again. You turned your head away from him though, and wouldn't look at the sweets he brought. For one thing they was peppermint, and you was an extraordinary fastidious child, and never could abide the smell of peppermint."

"'Aren't you glad to see me?' says he, half shame-faced, as well he might be.

"'It ain't likely she should be, pore ill-treated inner-cent,' I told him.

"'Won't you say a word to me?' says he.

"'Go-way—go-way!' cries you, and burrows beneath the counterpane.

"'All right, I'm going,' says he; and sure enough he went, and he never came back again, and, as I told Barbara, a good riddance he was, too, though I've known many worse."

"I wonder where he went to?" questioned Babette, still frowning.

"To hell-fire, I suppose," said Mary Anne briskly; "for he never was a believer, and the Lord knows he had nothing to boast of on his own merits."

Babette unexpectedly laughed.

"Oh, Miss Tavey, you said that so cheerfully! I wonder why it makes you feel cheerful? If I really believed that, you know, I should never have another happy moment."

Mary Anne shook her head reprovingly.

"It's no subject for laughing, nor yet for unbelief. If you don't take care you'll laugh the wrong side of your mouth one day. Your father was a mocker, too, and it seems to me that you take after Jethro more than a little."

"I don't—I am sure I don't!" Babette averred hotly. "That's all fancy, Miss Tavey; it is indeed. Why, people are always saying they see resemblances in me. Old Hannah says I am like my grandmother. Aunt Julie says that I am so like her brother that she would have known me anywhere! She recognized me intuitively as her own niece," naughty Babette cried, with a mischievous smile dimpling her cheek. Then suddenly she realized that she had revealed something that Mary Anne Tavey had never suspected, for the old woman sat bolt upright, clutching her work convulsively, her busy needle arrested midway in a stitch.

There was an awful pause, only the canary trilled louder than ever.

"Barbara Mary Anne Cole," said Mary Anne at last, in an awful voice, "you who is my christened god-daughter, do you mean to tell me that you ain't playing straight with your dead step-papa's grand family? Do you mean to tell me that you are gammoning them into the belief that Jethro and Barbara Cole's brat is a lady born and their own flesh and blood?"

"No, no! I didn't mean anything at all!" Babette cried hastily.

She tried to change the subject, and went on talking very fast.

"Do you know, Miss Tavey, I had almost forgotten that I was christened 'Barbara Mary Anne.' Everyone calls me Babette now. It's a pretty name; don't you think so? I like it far better than Barbara (though, of course, Mary is lovely, too). Do you think Babette is prettier than Barbara?"

But the frivolous digression was brushed aside.

"Barbara Mary Anne Cole," Miss Tavey repeated solemnly, "it is my bounden duty to impress on you that you are liable to be put in gaol, to sleep on a plank-bed, and to sup on bread and water for what you are doing now."

"And what has this poor child been doing that you threaten her with plank-bed and bread and water?" said a voice behind them.

Babette turned with a start. A thin, grey-haired man stood in the doorway. He had a grey moustache and the deep-set blue eyes that often belong to the enthusiast and the man of single purpose. He held himself like a soldier, and the empty sleeve of the left arm was pinned across his breast.

Babette caught her breath sharply. Was Mary Anne about to denounce her iniquities to this stranger?

"Good gracious me, Captain, what a jump you gave me!" said Mary Anne. "This young lady and me was just having our little joke together—you didn't suppose

I was in earnest, did you?" She laughed a forced, shrill cackle of a laugh. "Miss Cole doesn't look much like a gaol-bird either! This is my gentleman lodger, my dear—Captain Sargent of the Salvation Army."

Babette bowed, but the Salvation Captain held out his hand.

"Miss Tavey did wrong to frighten you in that way," said he, "for you should not fear them that can only injure the body."

"You make a mistake! I wasn't frightened. I have nothing to be afraid of," Babette interpolated defiantly.

"But you should fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell," he added gravely, and as if she had not spoken.

Babette hastily released her hand from his grasp; the situation was becoming intolerable.

"We've had a nice talk about old times, but now I must be going, Miss Tavey," said she.

At heart she was acutely conscious of how very far from "nice" this interview had proved, so far, at any rate, as she was concerned; but to speak pleasantly was an instinct with Babette, unless, indeed, she were very angry.

"No, no, Barbara! You just sit down again and take your cup of tea with us. Don't you go off in a hurry," said Mary Anne eagerly.

Babette knew that the old woman was anxious to obliterate the impression those overheard words had made on the mind of the Salvation Captain. Despite her sour ways, Mary Anne never would betray. Mary Anne would have died rather than have written those horrible letters!

"It won't be the first time by many that you'll have had a meal here," she continued. "This young lady has risen in the world, and been lately adopted by a family of title," she explained to her other guest; "but I was her mother's old friend, and so she comes to-day to find me—not 'avin' quite forgotten after all."

Her voice shook pathetically. She had kept a warm

place in her heart for poor Barbara's girl, and, deeply horrified though she was at Babette's revelation, yet she was on Babette's side. Seeing that Babette was still preparing to leave, she got up and clutched the hand that was pulling down a veil.

"Don't do that! don't go yet," she whispered. "There! after all these many years I don't feel as if I could let Barbara's own child go from me without so much as a sup or bite. Look now! it's past the time I set the tea. The kettle ought to be boiling by now, but the Captain will excuse me being unpunctual for this once."

"Here, give me the kettle; I'll fill it," said the Captain.

He walked off with it downstairs, and no sooner was the door shut on him than Babette seized Mary Anne by both arms.

"Oh, Mary Anne Tavey, you are being nearly as wicked as I am!" she cried. "But I love you for it, and I trust you."

"Your mother was an honest woman, Barbara," said Mary Anne in an agitated voice. It was years since she had been torn by such emotion.

"The game you're playing ain't honest, and it ain't safe."

"Mother married my stepfather! When you come to think of it, that wasn't such an over and above safe kind of thing to do either," Babette declared almost merrily. "I'm sure I think she was perfectly right; but of course she didn't know much about him. She didn't know who his father was; she didn't even know what his name was before he changed it into Rothenstein; she didn't know why he'd quarrelled with his people; she didn't know that he'd be kind to me! Well, he *was* kind, and I am grateful to him always, always," Babette declared, and she spoke with genuine fervour. "He was kind both to mummy and me; and what's more, he was fond of me, he really was. I don't believe he'd be a bit angry at what I'm doing. I think he'd



only be very much amused. It always amused him to watch me get round people."

Mary Anne shook her head.

"No, there's nothing amusing about it, Barbara Mary Anne," said she; "and as to your mother having taken a bit of risk too—no doubt she did, but what she did was above-board and straight, and what you are doing is secret and crooked, and that makes all the difference."

She sighed, her mind casting back to those old days before her friend's second marriage, for Babette's mother had supplied the warmest interest, even, in some queer, vicarious way, the romance, of this old maid's life.

"She was one who would take a risk, your mother was," she said. "And I sometimes thought to myself, that after all she hadn't seen Jethro Cole's dead body, and he could be tricky at times, and what if he wasn't so dead after all? But there; she never thought of that, and I wouldn't put it into her head, for I didn't want to stand in her way, seeing she'd not be happy single; and a hundred and fifty a year don't come our way often—not that *I'd* be bothered with a man at any price myself."

Babette sat down suddenly. Her knees knocked together; a sudden startling suspicion sent the colour from her face.

"You don't think he is alive? Did *he* write that letter? Oh, Miss Tavey, you don't know anything, do you?"

"Lawks, no!" said Mary Anne. "Good gracious me! He'd have given trouble before now if he had been alive. I don't know anything, and I don't know what letter you are talking about either. But there, my dear, I wouldn't have a conscience like yours for anything that any Sir Hubert in the world could give me."

The Salvation Captain's step sounded on the stairs. Babette flung off her fears, and turned gaily to the tea-table.

"May I make some toast?" she asked. "Do please let me be useful."

"No, thank you," said her hostess tartly. "I may not be a rich woman, but I am not so low that when I invite a lady visitor to tea I let her do the waiting."

The poor lady visitor was momentarily somewhat abashed, but her spirits were fortunately elastic, and she presently recovered herself, and certainly added to the gaiety of the entertainment.

It appeared that Captain Sargent had lately been sent a present of anchovy paste; that he was allowed to produce and share it was a signal proof of the great partiality which Mary Anne had for him. The guest apparently enjoyed her tea, and knew better than to look as if she did not relish condensed milk and a somewhat curious compound mixture that took the place of butter. In reality she was far from hungry, but whatever her faults, Babette's manners could usually be depended on. She chattered away pleasantly and merrily. She liked the Salvation Captain (Mary Anne commented to herself with a grim smile, "One can see she's one who likes anything in trousers"); she was prettily friendly and attentive to her mother's friend; and underneath all her girlish fun, which was genuine too, an uncomfortable dread stirred and stirred again.

"Perhaps one day I shall have to come back to this in disgrace—to a stuffy little room, and condensed milk and margarine, and *lucky if I get it*; or perhaps rather it will be plank-bed and water-gruel. But no, that it shan't be, because I would sooner die."

Once when the dread stirred and rustled underneath her other thoughts, she caught Captain Sargent looking at her with an expression of profound but impersonal comparison.

"Mary Anne Tavey couldn't throw dust in his eyes. He knows something is wrong. He thinks I am bad, and he is professionally interested in sinners," Babette thought. It further occurred to her (but she did not put the idea into words even to herself) that it would be more interesting if he were interested in *her*—not as a "case," but as Babette.

Presently the Salvation Captain began to talk—though not quite so fast as Babette. He spoke of the campaign against sin, and of the kingdom which is in, but not of this world.

A slightly dubious expression came into Babette's young face (making it momentarily harder and older) as she heard him.

"It's all very well to talk as if being cold and horribly hungry didn't matter so long as people were good. If you've never been cold and hungry, and dreadfully worried about where the next sixpence was to come from, you can look at things in that way. It sounds all right."

She got so far in her protest, but then, as she looked at the Salvation Captain's worn face, her defiance melted into puzzled wonder, for she was quickly susceptible to an impression of character, and this was no glib theorist.

"When rich ladies like Aunt Julie say, 'Material possessions are the least important in life,' why, then, you see, I think that's because they've never wanted what they have not been able to get; but I don't understand how you can talk so, you who *know*," said she.

"You must excuse her, Captain; she wasn't brought up very religious," said Mary Anne.

"Do you know life?" said the Salvation Captain to Babette. She nodded sagely, though her cheek dimpled. "Do you know what it is to be hungry and thirsty after righteousness? To be parched for the Living Water, and not know where to find it?" asked he.

Babette smiled at him with confiding friendliness, but shook her head.

"No, I never have felt in the least like that, and I don't suppose I ever shall, because, you see, I'm not at all that sort of person," she remarked. "I expect you must be a particular sort to really feel that kind of feeling. I've met people with it before—once or twice. I don't think it is very common, though."

"It's more than common—it's universal," said the

Salvation Captain. "It is bound to come to every living soul that ever comes into the world, but not to all at the same time. You don't know life yet, but you will some day."

Babette shook her head.

"I'm not quite sure that I've got a soul," she remarked cheerfully.

As soon as tea was over she took her leave. Though she was doubtful about her soul, there was little doubt that she possessed that equally uncomfortable possession—a heart.

"Will you please give me a kiss for my mother's sake? I shan't forget you again," she said to Mary Anne, very gently and humbly.

"I don't hold with kissing!" said Mary Anne, and kissed her.

Captain Sargent offered to see her to Spa Road Station, but as they emerged from the house they met Siegfried.

"I hardly expected you'd still be here, but thought I might as well come on the chance when I had done the Settlement job," said he.

Babette concealed a slight embarrassment.

"This is my cousin, Mr. Redstone," she said, turning to her first escort. "Siegfried, this is Captain Sargent of the Salvation Army. He kindly said he would walk with me to the station."

"Because it isn't a very good part for ladies to walk in after dark," said the Captain. "Our lassies are right enough; but they're different, and their uniform protects them. Now that you've got your cousin, I'll say good-bye to you, Miss Cole."

He took a friendly leave of them both, and went on his way.

Babette walked along quickly. Her cheeks burnt, and she glanced sidelong at Siegfried once or twice.

"That seems a nice chap. How did he come to lose his left arm?" asked Siegfried.

"I am sure I can't say," said Babette.

"And why on earth did he call you Miss Cole?"

"I suppose he made a slip. People do make such mistakes over names. Oh, Siegfried, how horribly greasy and dirty everything is, and now it's beginning to rain! How nasty this street smells, and my dress will drag! How dreadfully cross and tired I feel! I wish I had never come!"

Siegfried unfurled his umbrella.

"Catch hold of my arm. It's quite the fashion to do that here," said he.

"There are no hansoms about, so we can't hail one. Buck up, Babette! We'll soon be home and eating our soup. There, that's better—but, I say, I wouldn't do this often if I were you."

## CHAPTER IX

MRS. GRAHAM came downstairs dressed for a dinner at the Redstones.

It was an old-established custom that she and her son should dine with their neighbours on the last evening of their London season. Mrs. Graham was intending to start on the morrow on a round of country-house visits, and Frank was going on a yachting-trip to Norway with a friend. After that he was to begin his career in good earnest. He was to go out to Egypt in the autumn as private secretary to his mother's old admirer, Lord Strangham. It was a good opening for him; on the whole, Mrs. Graham was satisfied. It was true he had not done quite so brilliantly at college as some of his friends had anticipated, but he had taken his degree, and in her secret soul that was quite as much as Mrs. Graham expected. She did her very best for him, and was most careful never to discourage him by too cynical a discovery of his weaknesses, or to "give him away" to other people, but she had no illusions about him—she had few about anyone.

It was not quite time to start; there was just a minute or two to spare, and for once she sat with her busy hands resting on her lap. There was a good deal to consider.

Evening dress by daylight is trying to most middle-aged women, but Mrs. Graham stood the trial well. She drew the silken hood of her light wrap carefully over her head. It was like the sheath of some delicate flower, and was becoming to her. Her skin was wonderfully fine in texture and most delicately tinted; it was only in a strong light that you could see the

myriad fine lines that time had drawn about the corners of her blue eyes and about the small well-cut lips, that shut so very tight when she was neither smiling nor talking. She was always as neat as a new pin, and she was exquisitely finished from the tips of her manicured fingers to the point of her pretty shoe. It had been whispered that Mr. Graham had been a bad husband, and that the hunting accident in which he had been killed had been a fortunate accident for her. But if that were so, she had not confided her woes or her relief to anyone. She was not at all a confidential person. She had had many admirers, but had never wished to marry again. She was gregarious, but she had a horror of letting anyone come too close to her. Among her multitude of acquaintances no one really thoroughly knew her, because beyond a certain point she never really trusted anyone, but the Redstones believed her to be an "intimate friend," and Mrs. Durnham and she had been thrown together since schoolroom days, and were on Christian-name terms. "Harriet" had married first, and "Jessie" had been Harriet's bridesmaid. Later on Harriet consented to be Frank's godmother, and Jessie could have been Siegfried's had she been so minded.

"But godmother is altogether too serious a function for the likes of me—besides, it dates one!" she had said gaily.

Still, though she had refused that office, she liked Siegfried, and her lifelong comradeship with the Redstones was the nearest approach to friendship that she had ever made. That being so, it was curious how little sentiment of any kind weighed in the scale, as she sat balancing pros and cons while she waited for her son.

Frank was in love with this new arrival, this grandchild dropped full-grown from the skies, of course she saw that well enough. Well, in some ways he might do worse. Sir Hubert was rich; Miss Babette would presumably come in for money (Siegfried was the only other grandchild); and she was more than presentable,

she was distinctly attractive. Personally Mrs. Graham disliked the girl, but she was a ruler who was quite capable of subordinating a personal feeling to the welfare of her kingdom. On the other hand, there were some drawbacks. Babette's father had been a ne'er-do-weel and her mother a nobody. Though they needed money, she was by no means anxious that Frank should marry just yet. An indefinite engagement would do his career no harm, however, and it might induce him to take his work more seriously. Frank's mother was outwardly frivolous, but underneath the frivolity, she had a strong grip on life, while Frank himself was idealistic on the surface, but a dilettante at heart.

"If I had had a daughter (which, thank goodness! has been spared me) I should never have allowed *her* to make an indefinite engagement," the lady reflected; "but for a *son*, it's another pair of shoes." She was not one of the people who consider the good of other people's daughters in any way their business.

She was still considering this subject when Frank came into the room.

"Not late. Am I, mummy?" he asked.

"No, no! You are always ready in good time nowadays when we go to the Redstones," she said, with a laugh in her voice. "Dear me, how you have improved! How virtuous you have become about old family friends!"

She glanced merrily up at him. She was the daintiest little mother in the world. When Frank had been a boy he had sometimes felt how very firm were the hands that held the reins. Now that he was grown up he was under the happy persuasion that he did as he liked, but yet he had a lingering sense of awe towards the ex-ruler who had so gracefully abdicated in his favour when he came of age.

He laughed, too, but rather shyly. "It is no matter for chaff, mummy," he said. "This time it's—it's really serious."

He was a trifle nervous, lest she should remember



one or two occasions on which he had assured her of his entire seriousness, but she didn't allow the ghost of a memory to intervene between them.

"Ah, it is the little Babette, and no wonder!" she said. "She is charming—quite charming!"

"Then you like her?" Frank cried, in a relieved tone. "She always tells me that you don't, but I was sure she was wrong there. She does get hold of wrong ideas sometimes."

Mrs. Graham's mind registered two facts. Babette had discovered at once that there was antipathy between them, and Frank, though in love, thought Babette sometimes wrong.

"It appears to me that the question is not how much your old mother likes Miss Babette, nor even how much Miss Babette likes your old mother, but rather how much she likes you," she ventured, for she felt it advisable to find out how far Frank had gone. He was a rash young man; she had had to extricate him from unsuitable entanglements before now.

"She is such a will-o'-the-wisp," said he. "One moment you think you have her, and the next moment she is dancing miles away."

"Then I shouldn't be in too great a hurry if I were you," said she. "You'll never catch a will-o'-the-wisp by rushing blindly at it. Let her take her fill of dancing for awhile, my son; your chances will be the better in the end. And now let us start."

Frank would have liked to have talked more about Babette, but he couldn't. His mother was always careful not to cheapen her counsel by expending it too lavishly. She tripped along by his side as they walked in the sweet summer evening, and she chatted as gaily as if she were in her twenties, but she allowed no further confidences.

The Redstones' house had never been a dull one, but it seemed to Frank that the whole atmosphere of it had been changed and electrified by the advent of Babette, that she made exciting what had before been

merely pleasant. Certainly Babette herself was excited that evening. She laughed oftener than usual; she talked more; she made gay little sallies; her wit flashed prettily across the dinner-table in mock encounters with her grandfather. All her dainty movements fascinated Frank; he could not eat for looking at her. When she sipped champagne she reminded him of a bird drinking. She had come home from Spa Road feeling dead tired, miserable, and heart-sick; but now her fatigue vanished; she was in that mood known too well of artists, musicians, and women, when every impression is oversharpened and vivid, when all the strings seemed screwed too tight.

After dinner they all went into the billiard-room, where Babette perched herself on the arm of Sir Hubert's chair while Siegfried and Frank knocked the balls about. Frank was a good player, Siegfried a bad one. Sir Hubert felt annoyed that his grandson did not in the least mind acquitting himself badly.

"You could do better than that if you took trouble about it. You play a disgracefully bad game," he said, as he watched the two young men while he smoked his pipe.

"So I do; but I don't want to take trouble about it," Siegfried replied, with his broad, good-natured smile.

His impervious good-temper always irritated his grandfather, but Babette secretly admired it.

"Siegfried is the most independently minded person I've ever met," she said to herself. "He never lives up to other people's standards, even about games, and he doesn't know he is unconventional, because he doesn't think about himself. What does he think of? Why, of creatures fished out of stagnant ponds, and corked into green bottles."

"You don't like smoke I know, Jessie," said Mrs. Durnham. "Let's go into another room."

"You will withdraw into the withdrawing-room," Babette cried gaily. "Do you want *me* to withdraw too, granddad?"

"My pipe wants refilling. You may stay if you make yourself useful, Baby," said he.

"Oh, I always do that," said Babette. She fluttered across to the mantelpiece to fetch his tobacco-pouch, and then returned to poise herself again by his side. Mrs. Durnham swept out of the room with her free, stately gait. She was unpleasantly reminded of a picture of Merlin and Vivian, though, to be sure, Vivian was not Merlin's granddaughter.

All three men looked at the girl as she began to fill the pipe: Frank, with eyes that she could not meet, because they brimmed over with declarations of love; Sir Hubert, with the fondness of an old man for a late-found treasure; Siegfried, with friendly observation. He alone saw that as she crammed the tobacco into the bowl she winked away moisture from her eyelashes, and he alone knew that it was the second time that evening that she had been assailed by an inclination to tears. He was accustomed to noticing tiny, almost unobservable, facts, because he was a student of natural history; he was accustomed to refrain from making any sign that might disturb the little wild creatures he observed. He never so much as breathed quicker when, as he lay on a hillside watching, the watch became interesting.

In the drawing-room the two mothers were left *tête-à-tête*, for Miss Redstone was going on to a musical party, and had excused herself with her accustomed fervour of protestation.

"Nothing else in the world would tempt me to forego the pleasure of your company, Jessie, but I must hear Stefano Chekowski once more—I simply must. He draws me like the Pied Piper. Such a weird personality! Not yet nineteen, but with the technique of a master and the soul of a great genius!"

"Really, Julie's power of admiration remains admirably young," Mrs. Graham remarked, as the door shut on the happy burner of incense.

Mrs. Durnham made no reply for a few seconds, then spoke very gravely.

"I doubt whether it is admirable to be either young or old out of season. I do not like young people who have a keen eye for the main chance, and who pander to the foibles of their elders in order to gain their own ends, and I am sorry when I see people who should be old enough to know better carried away by sudden infatuations."

"I dare say Julie is wearing to live with," said Mrs. Graham lightly. "Other people's hobbies bore one horribly, but I should have thought that you must be accustomed to hers by this time. I usually respect the calm and placid way in which you stand like a rock, and let her adorations sparkle and foam and rise like a high-tide to a certain point, and then recede again. After all, the tide always does recede."

"Yes; but sometimes it leaves wrecks behind it," said Mrs. Durnham gloomily.

Mrs. Graham shot a quick glance at her.

"Ah, well, I suppose Julie's infatuations occasionally empty her pocket (I never could stick to a simile, my dear); but, after all, that doesn't affect you much. You've got plenty, you enviable people! You can afford an occasional absurdity."

The sound of Babette's voice singing a snatch of popular song, and then the deeper notes of men's pleased laughter, floated up to them. Mrs. Durnham's sombre eyes sought her friend's.

Mrs. Graham was not in the least sympathetic in reality, but she was capable of an acute understanding of other people's states of mind. She understood with her brain rather than her heart. She was interested now, and anxious, for once, to encourage a confidence.

"You are disturbed about that little enchantress who smiles on all mankind so ingratiatingly. Why are you troubled, Harriet? What is wrong?" she asked.

"I wish I knew!" said Mrs. Durnham. "I am not clever as you are, Jessie. The girl is not straight. I am sure of that. She isn't strictly truthful. She is unnaturally tactful and anxious to please. She loves luxury, and enjoys staying here; but, all the same, she

is not as happy as she professes to be. She panders to my father's and to my sister's weaknesses. I cannot bear to see her with him at times."

Mrs. Graham's keen judgment sifted these statements critically. That last sentence revealed to her that "Harriet was frightfully jealous."

"Girls are seldom strictly truthful, you know—at least, not that type of girl who lays herself out to charm," she remarked, "and, of course, we all of us pretend to be gayer than we are at times. I don't blame Miss Babette for that. The world would be insupportable if we went about with long faces whenever we felt sad. Is that all you have against her?"

"It seems to me a good deal," said Mrs. Durnham grimly. "You apparently think it a small matter that my father and sister should be cheated. I have not spoken of my suspicions to anyone else. Where would be the use? We know what Julie is. And as for my dear father, his generosity and singleness of heart, his impetuous temper, his very reaction against the just anger he felt so long—all these factors work on the side of this girl. That I have been a good daughter these many years, that my boy has never caused him a moment's anxiety—that doesn't count at all. The solid commonplace virtues don't count much with us."

"Very jealous—very jealous indeed!" Mrs. Graham ejaculated inwardly. "But what exactly are your grounds for suspicion, and what exactly do you suspect?" she asked.

"It would take me hours to tell you all the things I have noticed," said Mrs. Durnham. "I say nothing. I sit and work and look on, you know; but one incident occurred only this evening. Babette refused to go out with my sister to-day; she said that her head was aching too much. Yet I saw her slip out of the house alone; she was out all the afternoon. She evaded questions. I did not press them, for you do not get the truth from a liar by questioning. She is mysterious, though she appears open and frank to a fault. She receives letters that frighten her. One was waiting for

her when she came in this evening. She picked it up and slid it into her pocket, but I saw that she was quite white. She is miserably afraid now; that is why she is chattering and laughing so much."

"Fancy you, of all people, turning into a private detective!" said Mrs. Graham lightly.

She was rather amused that her friend Harriet should have collected this evidence. Harriet had always been a dignified woman, quite above spying, and contemptuous of gossip; but she was aware that the madness of jealousy, like the madness of drink, will make good people do really mean things.

"You may think it funny," said Mrs. Durnham bitterly and slowly, her deep voice sounding through the room with a note of tragedy in it. "You may think it all funny, but I see no fun in the fact that Babette is wheedling her way before my own son in his grandfather's affections, that this sly interloper——"

"Oh!" said a voice in the doorway. "You do seem to be having such an exciting conversation. I am sorry we have interrupted you, Aunt Harriet, but we have only come to look for a piece of music."

Babette stood there for a moment with a smile on her lips. Frank Graham, slightly embarrassed, looked over her shoulder. There was a rose-colour in her cheeks, and the pupils of her eyes were dilated, making her eyes darker.

"I wish so much that I could make my voice carry like Aunt Harriet's," she said; "I always notice it. She does not have to raise it in the least, but you can hear every word distinctly quite a long way off."

She looked straight at Mrs. Durnham with pride, defiance, and yet a saving humour in her expression.

"I always think it is beautiful, you know," said she, and walked across the room, picked up her music, and departed again, carrying her small head very high indeed.

Mrs. Graham laughed.

"My dear Harriet, if you are going to cope with that young lady, you'll have just as much as ever you can manage."

## CHAPTER X

"Since there's no help, come, let us kiss and part!  
Nay, I have done. You get no more of me.  
And I am glad, yea, glad with all my heart,  
That thus so clearly I myself can free.  
Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,  
And when we meet at any time again,  
Be it not seen in either of our brows  
That we one jot of former love retain."

DRAYTON.

FRANK GRAHAM was indignant. He, too, had heard Mrs. Durnham's words—"A sly interloper, wheedling her way." Was that how one should speak of his sweet April lady—his will-o'-the-wisp? "What a shame! what a beastly shame!" he cried warmly, as he and Babette ran downstairs together. "I shall never like Mrs. Durnham again—never. You were splendid, Babette. I hope she felt ashamed."

"I don't care," said Babette. "I've always known that Aunt Harriet hates me. I knew it from the moment she set eyes on me when I first walked into the house. She never pretends to love me. She never makes pretences of any kind. Lucky woman! She's never had to."

They had reached the hall now, and her hand was on the handle of the smoking-room door, but Frank drew her away.

"Come out into the garden. I want you all to myself," he said. "I am going away to-morrow. This is our last evening together for ever so long. Won't you come, Babette?"

"Oh, I am tired—tired—tired," said Babette. "I had better not."

The garden-door stood open, the evening was hot, Frank's voice was persuasive and very tender.

"It's no wonder you feel wearied to death," he cried. "You've been singing and laughing and entertaining us all in that smoking atmosphere the whole evening. We are so selfish and you are so sweet you—you *dear*."

He had caught her hand in his to prevent it from turning the handle; somehow he could not help lifting it to his lips. Babette had never seemed to him so fascinating as she seemed that evening. His remnant of prudence vanished. Anger and sympathy had carried him out of himself, a state which did not often occur, for this young man, though decidedly susceptible to soft emotions, was seldom swept off his feet into deep waters.

"Oh, don't do that!" said Babette, with a sound that was meant for a laugh, but came near to a sob. Her heart, too, was beating overfast, and all at once a longing to trust him submerged her. She liked Frank Graham so much; to-night she was on the verge of loving him. Something—was it maiden shyness or an insight that lay deeper than the attraction he had for her?—warned her.

"If I am alone with you, and you are sympathetic and kind, all sorts of things will slip off my tongue, Frank," she cried, "and I know that they had much better not."

But that certainly was hardly the way to persuade a man to desist from entreaty. And perhaps she knew that—perhaps she wanted to be further entreated. Anyway, she yielded, and she sighed with pleasure as they went out into the cool, sweet garden.

"What things will slip off your tongue?" he whispered. "Tell me—tell me now. Dear little Babette, supposing that there were someone who loved you more than all the world, would you be glad? Shall I tell you something first, Babette?"

Perhaps it was no great wonder that he should have



fancied Babette's secret was like his own, and that his will-o'-the-wisp was all but caught. But she held him away from her, half laughing.

"No, no, I don't mean that!" she cried. "Oh, Frank, the world isn't all made up of love and flowers and gardens and such pretty, delightful things. There are other secrets in it, and they aren't all nice ones. I suppose I am a dreadful cheat, but if you care—if you really care—for me I can't cheat *you*."

The arm with which he had been trying to encircle her fell limply at his side.

"What do you mean?" he said blankly.

"Oh, I so want to tell you!" Babette cried. "It's so lonely not to have anyone who knows. Frank, have you never guessed, never had the faintest idea? Why, I nearly as possible let it out once before, when we talked of my childhood, and you blamed him for letting me live in a basement. That was before I ever met him. All the roughest part of my life was before he came into it. You see, Mr. Redstone was not really my father. He was——"

"Stop! I don't want to hear!" said Frank.

His voice sounded hoarse and odd. It was dusk, but Babette, peering at him anxiously through the half light, could see that he had actually turned quite white.

"I won't hear! I won't believe! You couldn't be so wicked! It's a lie—a silly lie you are making up for a joke; but you shouldn't make such jokes as that!" the poor boy cried.

But he did believe—nay, more, he believed a far worse thing than Babette guessed. If the man she had travelled about with from place to place were not her father, what was he to her? If she were not Sir Hubert Redstone's granddaughter, who and what was she? He began to laugh, but with a queer sound in his laughter that startled her.

"It's nonsense—all nonsense! But what don't you deserve for such a trick, Babette? You shall pay for it with a kiss!" he cried.

Babette started back angrily.

"Be quiet! Listen to me and be quiet, Frank," she said. "Yes, we have both been making bad jokes and telling wicked lies. You told me that you cared for me, you know. I nearly believed you, and trusted you. It was very silly of me. I told you something, too, and *you* nearly believed that. That was very foolish, though you were not so foolish as I was. Now, I am going to forget your bad joke, and you must forget mine. Do you hear? You must forget my lie, as I shall forget yours."

He felt that she was contemptuous, and her contempt seemed to cut like the cut of a lash. Surely it was for *him* to feel angry, not for her.

"Then—then it wasn't true—what you said?" he cried; but his voice faltered.

"Nothing is true," said Babette—"neither you, nor I, nor anything in all the world."

"Babette! Babette! Where are you, Baby?"

Sir Hubert's voice was calling her. He had finished his pipe and stepped through the open window on to the terrace.

"Are you in the garden? Don't stay out too long; there's a suspicion of damp in the air."

Babette turned quickly and ran up the steps to him. She slid her hand into the old man's as she stood beside him.

"Why, you've no shawl on, and your fingers are as cold as ice! What an extremely silly Baby you are!" said he. "And where is Frank? I heard his voice just now, but he seems to have vanished into space. Why did you let him carry you off into the garden without putting anything round your shoulders? He is rather a young idiot is Frank!"

"He is not nearly so nice as you are, anyhow, granddad," said Babette.

The clasp of his hand was comforting to her, "and yet if he knew he would let me go," she said to herself.

"I am glad you have the sense to see that, grand-

daughter," said he, laughing; "old-seasoned blades are the best to trust to, my dear."

"It doesn't really do to trust to anyone," said Babette wearily. "It's a great mistake. For the future I don't ever mean to do it."

Sir Hubert laughed again. He was himself the most unsuspicious of men, but he had had a few misgivings about Frank Graham. He did not wish to lose his grandchild directly after he had found her. He was by no means inclined to welcome a suitor for Babette. Her tone reassured him.

"Quite right. You stick to that Baby," said he. "Master Frank is all very well in the right place, but we don't want too much of him."

They went back into the house together, and the very last idea that would have entered his head was that Babette meant what she said.

Mrs. Graham met them in the hall. She had been donning her pink cloak again.

"I mustn't be tempted to stay late to-night, for this time to-morrow I shall be taking that wearisome journey north," said she. "I never can sleep a wink in the train. I should prefer to travel by daylight, but Frank likes best to go by 9 p.m. We are kept in such terrible order by our children, aren't we, Sir Hubert?"

"Not to mention our grandchildren," said he. "But you haven't got to that stage yet, Jessie. Where on earth is Frank?"

"Here! Are you ready, mummy? I've been hunting for my silver match-box. I dropped it in the geranium bed," said Frank, coming up behind her.

"And Miss Baby deserted you, eh?" said Sir Hubert, pinching Babette's ear.

"Yes. I hate searching, so I deserted him at once," said Babette.

She despised Frank at that moment. He was looking quite pale and shaken. Any child could have seen that something had happened to perturb him. She

was sure his mother saw. He couldn't play the game. In the sudden reaction from that soft mood when she had longed to confide in him, Babette felt as if her heart had hardened into a sharp-edged blade.

"You couldn't be so wicked!" he had cried.

"Yes, I could. I'm capable of any wickedness," Babette said to herself.

She took a gay farewell of him. She wasn't going to give herself away any more. Her green eyes mocked at him. Frank never quite liked being laughed at. There had always been a something in Babette that had slightly alienated him, even when he was most in love with her, a something a little too wild and a little too shrewd, a little too elfish. But now he felt sick with revulsion; his wild nymph had turned into a most baleful witch.

He did not hear one word that Mrs. Graham said to him on the way home. She speculated curiously as to what had happened. Probably he had proposed to Babette, and she had refused him.

"I had a distinctly dull evening," she said, when they stood in their own hall again. "I didn't in the least wish to be dragged upstairs to a *tête-à-tête* with Harriet Durnham. I would far rather have watched the comedy in the smoking-room. I suppose you heard that speech of Mrs. Durnham's. She's horribly jealous for Siegfried's interests—that's what is the matter with her, you know."

"Oh yes, of course I heard," he replied gloomily, and she observed that he was no longer up in arms for Babette.

"Your little lady had a spirit of her own," she remarked tentatively. "I rather admired it, didn't you?"

"I did indeed," said he, but with a bitterness that implied that the admiration was of the past.

"Of course her grandfather is absurdly infatuated," she ventured.

Frank confronted her with such a miserable look on

his face that for a moment even Mrs. Graham was startled.

"I suppose I may as well tell you that everything is over between her and me. I never wish to hear her name mentioned again, please."

"Oh, my dear boy, don't be so tragic!" cried his mother. "So she refused you? But a first refusal means nothing. At eighteen one may well expect to be asked twice at least. She is a silly child, no doubt, but——"

"Oh no, she isn't that," said Frank. He laughed discordantly as he had laughed in the garden. "You're quite out of it, mother, as much out of it as I was. Babette is no silly child. And she did not refuse to marry me, for I did not ask her, and I most certainly never shall. I don't intend to answer any questions or to say any more about it. I've been a fool (though no doubt I'm not the only one), and so far as I'm concerned that's the end of it."

And with that he wheeled round and went out of the house again, banging the front-door after him.

If Mrs. Graham had been a man she would have whistled.

"Now, I wonder if Harriet is right after all, and if there is something wrong about that girl?" she asked herself. "One can't know what may not have happened to her while she was knocking about in France under the very inadequate care of poor Stephen. She receives letters that frighten her. She has certainly told Frank something that has shocked him. Probably there is a man in the case. She's rather that kind. Dear me! What a mercy that she didn't accept Frank!"

Babette, too, was saying to herself, "What a mercy!" but she was saying it bitterly.

"What a mercy I didn't let him propose to me first! I might have quite easily. What a mercy I've got such a hard, hard heart, because if I hadn't it might have got broken!"

"How early they've gone! It's only just eleven!" said Sir Hubert.

The old musician was apt to wake like a nightingale at night, and sometimes his daughter Julie, and sometimes little Babette, would linger with him.

"I shall wait up for Julie. Who'll keep me company?" he asked gaily.

"Siegfried will; Babette and I are going to bed," said Mrs. Durnham firmly.

Siegfried was about to say that he should go to bed too, but a severely warning frown from his mother prevented him, and with a suppressed yawn and a good-natured "All right; I'll stop and smoke if you want me to," he resigned himself to sitting up.

\* \* \* \*

A dead silence supervened when the two men were left together. Siegfried never saw why he should talk if he had nothing in particular to say; he could be quite comfortably and unamorously silent, but his grandfather was uneasy. Sir Hubert had always the desire to be ideally just, and he was vaguely aware that his daughter Harriet was nursing some grievance. It would never do to let Harriet fancy that he preferred that new found little baggage of a granddaughter to her own steady and excellent son. He must try to "get on" with the boy—a feat never quite accomplished! "We've not seen much of you lately," he said at last.

"No; I hate towns!" said Siegfried.

"I am glad of this opportunity of a talk with you about future plans. Now you've done with Cambridge (and I must say, my boy, that you've taken a far higher degree than you led us to expect)—now you've done with Cambridge it is time you made up your mind as to your career."

"Oh, career? I don't know about a career, but I shall grub along, I dare say," said Siegfried.

Sir Hubert kicked his foot out impatiently. His

own eager youth rose before him. What was this generation made of? Then he thought about poor Stephen, and curbed his impatience.

"We want you to do better than that. Have you no ambition?" said he.

Siegfried hesitated, and actually turned rather red. He was not an emotional person.

"Well, ye-es, in a way I have," he said. "I—I almost think I *have* discovered something about the larvæ of——"

Sir Hubert interrupted hastily. "Pshaw! I am not talking about beetles! I want you to be serious!"

Siegfried nodded with unabated good temper, for it was not his grandfather's opinion of him, but the excitement of the fact that he had discovered that had caused him to blush. "I *am* serious," he said.

His grandfather sighed.

"I should have been glad had you shown a desire to enter one of the services, but you were set against going into the army or navy, and I believe it is a mistake to force a profession on a lad," he said. "Later on your mother and I were anxious that you should prepare for the diplomatic service with Frank Graham. That requires money, which I could gladly have supplied, but of course I allow that it also requires brains."

"Which you couldn't pass on, you know," Siegfried put in cheerfully. "Frank Graham's quite another sort of Johnnie to me!"

A puzzled expression crept over Sir Hubert's face, as he recollected that after all Siegfried had taken a higher degree than Frank.

"You must not undervalue yourself," he said kindly, "Though you may not be clever enough for diplomacy, I see no reason why you should not do very well in some other line. Architecture, now? Have you ever thought of architecture?"

"I am not going to be an architect," said Siegfried.

"Medicine? That is not what I should have chosen

for you, but still, if you have decided leanings that way, I wouldn't say no."

"I haven't, thank you."

"The church?"

"Lord, no! I wouldn't be a parson if you paid me a guinea a minute."

"Well, what on earth do you want to do? I should be ashamed to be forced to suppose that a grandson of mine wanted to do nothing," cried Sir Hubert with some heat.

The glow and fire in his own soul ought surely to inspire this heavier and more lumpish nature. To possess youth, that dear gift so soon withdrawn, to possess and not wish to use it—it was maddening to think of!

Sir Hubert's ambitions had never been vulgar. Fortune had flung him gifts prodigally, but his eyes had been set on the goal, not on the reward. He had made music in the service of the high gods, and the indignation that filled him now was, after all, unworldly.

"I can't understand a young man who—who wants nothing!" he said, knitting his brows and looking at the sandy-haired, stolid grandson with eyes that seemed to glow like coals.

Siegfried offered no explanation for a minute or two; then, seeing that one was ardently expected of him, he said in a placable tone:

"Well, grandfather, you see I don't care to waste time in fussing round doing all kinds of things. That isn't my job."

"You don't care to waste time in doing things? Do you mean that you desire to enter a Carmelite monastery or to become a hermit?" asked his grandfather scornfully. "What was the youth aiming at? or was it that he had no aims; that he was simply lazy?"

"That wouldn't be a bad idea in some ways," said Siegfried with his broad, good-tempered smile. "One might get some undisturbed time as a hermit, eh? But then I suppose there would be prayers, and chants,



and services, and that. They'd be an awful nuisance from my point of view."

"From your point of view; have you any point of view worth mentioning?"

"Oh, well, *I* think so, you know. I dare say it seems rather tommy-rot, though, to you," said Siegfried at last, seeing that an answer was again demanded of him. He certainly was not a glib exponent of his own ideas.

Sir Hubert waited for some moments, swinging his foot impatiently the while. Perhaps more information might be forthcoming; but no, Siegfried had relapsed into his comfortable and unembarrassed silence. He certainly possessed something of his mother's passivity of demeanour.

"I wish I knew what to make of you!" Sir Hubert cried.

Siegfried took his pipe out of his mouth and looked at his grandfather with a slight expression of surprise.

"But really, granddad, I don't see——" he began, and then checked himself.

"You don't see what? Go on; finish your sentence, man; I am sure I am always ready enough to listen."

"Well, I don't mean to be disrespectful and that," said Siegfried, who not only was lamentably deficient in the family faculty for using words fluently, but had also a trick (irritating to any lover of good English) of ending his sentences with "and that." "I don't want to be disrespectful and that, but when you speak of not knowing what to make of me I wonder why you bother yourself; you needn't, you know, because you haven't got to make me, because, as a matter of fact, *I am* made."

With that he got up, gave his grandfather a friendly nod, and, bidding him good-night, left the room.

Sir Hubert stared after him perplexed. Siegfried's remarks were sometimes so absolutely simple that they appeared to his family to be almost idiotic.

The young man put his pipe in his pocket and

whistled "Yankee Doodle went to town" gently and under his breath as he went up the stairs. It was one of the only three tunes he knew; yet though there was little music in him, his ear, like his eye, had been trained to a quick and accurate attention, and as he went along the passage to his bedroom, he paused for a moment, because a sad, small muffled sound reached him. Few people would have heard it through the thickness of a closed door.

Siegfried was no Sherlock Holmes, neither was he in the least inquisitive. Though he had instinctively stayed his step, he walked on the next moment, resuming his whistling as he walked. It was no business of his; no business of his at all.

Nevertheless, that sound recurred to his mind several times. He was a most excellent sleeper, being the happy possessor of perfect health, but he woke twice or thrice that night, and each time that he woke he remembered the sound and felt sorry about it.

"No business of mine at all," he repeated, "but she is such a nice little thing, and fluttering so; she'll hurt herself. She shouldn't be crying like that all alone."

## CHAPTER XI

"No man is so foolish but may give another good counsel sometimes ; and no man is so wise but may easily err, if he will take no other's counsel but his own. . . . For he that was only taught by himself had a fool to his master."—BEN JONSON.

MISS DUPINS sat in her newly furnished sitting-room in Chelsea and stifled a sigh as she glanced up from her work. On her return from France she had resigned her position as head of the Lady Jane Grey College, but her hands were still pretty full. She had five pupils, two for mathematics and three for Greek, and she was just finishing correcting their papers when the clock of Chelsea Hospital struck five, and her maid brought in the tea.

The sigh had perhaps arisen for the fuller and more responsible life that she had relinquished (she had anchored in a backwater, and this surely was the beginning of "the evening of life"), but it was stifled because one has no business to sigh while one still has one's faculties at command.

"Blessed is he who has found his work ; let him ask no other blessedness."

In fact when she considered the matter it was not work but rather playtime that depressed her. She could work alone happily enough, but she had never properly cultivated the art of play. Solitary meals bored her ! Like most women, she never felt that an unshared feast repaid the trouble of serving and eating ! In the college some claims, indeed, only too many claims, had usually invaded her short spare moments ;

now she read to herself while she drank her tea, but missed accustomed interruptions.

When the front-door bell rang it occurred to her that after all it had been "worth while" to have cream and muffins!

She expected to see one of her old pupils. She turned to the door with a kindly welcome.

"How good of you to come through this fog!" she cried, and then stopped short, for behold! it was no waterproofed and spectacled young woman, but a rather burly man who advanced into the room.

"I don't know about goodness," said he, "for I never should go to see anyone whom I didn't wish to see. There isn't any goodness in doing what one likes, is there? How are you, Miss Dupins? I hope that you are stronger than you were when we last met at Compiègne?"

It was her friend of the French boarding-house. Memories crowded on her at the sound of his voice, and at the sight of the rugged face, with the reddish-brown humorous eyes—the remembrance of those funny conversations at which she had acted as interpreter, of the veranda with the table laid for dinner, of the prim garden and the pink-toned house, of the strain and stress of conflict in her own mind always going on beneath her surface amusement and interest in the foreign life round her.

Then he realized that her first welcome had been intended for someone else, and that she was slightly surprised and taken aback by his visit.

"I hope that I am not intrusive," he said earnestly. "If I am you have only to say so. I am not one to force myself on a lady whether she will or no."

Well, no doubt it is one thing to play a part graciously at a boarding-house, and another to receive a man who isn't a gentleman in one's own home. Miss Dupins had been momentarily dumbfounded, but her instincts were hospitable, and she was grateful. Mr. Cole had unwittingly been a consolation and dis-

traction at a painful and critical time, and his bold and frankly given advice had weighed in a balance that she had held till her own hand shook.

"Why, I am very glad to see you," she said kindly.

"Ah. That's all right then," said he cheerfully. "Just for the moment I was afraid that you thought my calling on you was rather a bit of cheek on my part. But it was never intended so. No; not at all so!"

"I am sure it wasn't," said she. "Do sit down and let me give you some tea."

Mr. Cole sat down, and looked round him with unabashed interest. He was not in the least awkward or self-conscious, but neither was he in the least like any other man who had ever been, or ever could be, guest of hers. She remembered him as a great talker, but he said little at first. He seemed to be occupied in taking his bearings. She wondered how he had discovered where she lived, and what was the object of his visit. It was possible that he had come across one of the College girls—many of them came from the lower middle class—and that she had spoken to him of the late head-mistress.

"Have you met any mutual friend who reminded you of me and of our acquaintance abroad?" she asked.

"No," said he; "I don't suppose that you and I have any mutual friends."

He stirred his tea thoughtfully round and round rather as if he were stirring a pudding. It was a trick that she had noticed at Compiègne, and had longed to correct.

"I have a fairly good memory; I didn't need reminding," he said. "I asked Madame Berne about you before I left the pension. She told me that you were the head-mistress of a hen college. I made a note of it—in my mind, I mean—but when I first got back to England I was too taken up with business to have time to attend to anything else. I went to the college to-day and got your address. This is the first possible oppor-

tunity I could make. You will have heard by now of Tylerine, I suppose?"

"Oh yes; the papers have been full of it," said Miss Dupins.

He nodded. "Yes, it's great. It has all the qualities and twice the wearing power of rubber. (The rubber-planters will soon be looking blue, I can tell you. Don't you be persuaded to take shares in any of their plantations, by the way.) That was what I went over to France about. I couldn't get anyone here to float me. Monsieur Carron took it up finally. He has the great motor factory near Compiègne, you know. I shall soon double his income, and I am sorry he isn't English. I've got my patent out, of course. The factory where I am making the stuff now has orders from five great firms, but we can't work it fast enough. We *shall* supply all Europe. There is a colossal fortune in Tylerine. You may take your dying oath of that fact."

"Indeed! I congratulate you," said Miss Dupins politely. But the idea of colossal fortunes left her cold; she was not greatly interested in them.

"You've never been poor?" said Mr. Cole.

"I have certainly never been colossally rich, but I have had enough," said she simply. "I don't hanker after any more."

She knew that no impertinence was intended, but she regarded him with a faint astonishment. His discernment was quick, and he apologized.

"I beg your pardon. I see it wasn't quite manners to say that. Seeing that you were a worker, I supposed at first set-out that you worked for your living; but now"—he nodded at his surroundings as if they had really told him a good deal—"now I understand that it isn't so. In a way, that makes it more awkward for me."

"Makes what more awkward?" she asked.

"What I meant to ask you," he explained. "You are a first-rate teacher. I found that out at Compiègne. I came here to ask you to take me on again, but on

business terms this time, and at your own price. No offence, I hope?"

"No offence whatever," Miss Dupins said, laughing. "I feel complimented. Teaching is my line, as I told you, and you are an excellent pupil; but all the same, I cannot accept your kind suggestion, for I do not teach modern languages professionally. Mathematics and Greek are my especial subjects, and I should not care to poach on other people's grounds. I can recommend a really good French teacher to you, however, and one who *is* French. It would be absurd for you to have an Englishwoman in that capacity. I will write down address and terms."

"Hold on. I don't want them," said he; "I wanted you. What I really require isn't French—it is just to be put up to the ropes. Mind, I don't set up to be a gentleman; at my time of life that's beyond me, and I don't care about veneers. At the same time there's no need to make flagrant blunders. I mean to see something of what's called society, but I don't mean to be a laughing-stock. It is there that I thought you might help me. I could learn a lot from just watching and talking to you. If you set to work to give me tips, I should learn still more, and it may be things that are worth learning," he added thoughtfully, "for I'm not prejudiced."

"I am afraid I couldn't possibly undertake that," said Miss Dupins.

"But why not?" he persisted.

"I don't profess to coach people in the manners and customs of society," she replied, and this time she refrained from adding that she could recommend someone else.

"If you won't, you won't," he said, with a sigh. "I can't very well press you to do it, for the matter doesn't stand quite as I thought it would. If it had been a case of £ s. d., it would have been otherwise; *then* I should offer to make it well worth your while. Since you don't want my money, I can't keep on begging

you to make me a present of your time and trouble ; but yet it is a great pity, because (besides the use to me) there's the fact that you would really enjoy the job."

Miss Dupins offered him a second cup of tea at this juncture, and so changed the subject.

She was so scrupulously truthful that she could not deny that she would have enjoyed the job. A new type of pupil had immense attractions for her, though his idea had struck her as absurd on the face of it. She drew him on to talk shop over his second cup. Though unexcited over the colossal fortune, she was intelligently interested in the discovery of the substitute for india-rubber. She had studied chemistry, and Mr. Cole was surprised at the pertinence of her remarks.

"It's a new thing to me to find a woman who cares for such matters," said he. "There's a deal to talk over in the world, and of late it's come over me that there is a particular and queer kind of sensation to be got out seeing the way other folks take hold of a subject."

"Certainly," said Miss Dupins. "Why, the whole point and pleasure of any society worth calling society lies there."

"Ah, and that's what I don't know about, and what you might have taught me if you could have just brought yourself to be friendly," said he ruefully. "And it couldn't have done you any harm, miss."

The sentence struck her as pathetic, even to the un-called-for "miss" that had slid out unawares at the end. Why, after all, should she be so churlish? A woman of her age and standing might well exercise her mild hospitality as she chose, and the man, though not of her class, was respectable, clever, and even rather interesting.

"Very well," she said. "Since you wish it, let us by all means be friendly, Mr. Cole. I am usually in to tea on Saturdays, though you will not always find me alone. Come to see me again, if you like; as you say, there are plenty of things besides rubber that it would



be interesting to discuss. Only it can't be a business transaction. I should be reduced to utter silence if I felt that I were being paid for my feeble remarks. That plan is clearly impossible."

He nodded gravely.

"Thank you," he said. "I should like to come again, and though I mayn't pay you in money, I shan't forget that I am in your debt. It appears to me that it mayn't be a bad thing for a single woman (choose who she is), to know that there is a man handy who would be willing to do her a good turn at a pinch."

"Indeed, that must always be far from a bad thing," said she. "Not that I am not without men belonging to me, who would always help me if I needed them. I have a father alive, and I have a brother, who is a clergyman in the East End."

"*Old* men ain't good for much, and a parson don't count as a man," said Mr. Cole; then, seeing his hostess colour with displeasure, he added, "Not that I meant to show 'em any disrespect."

"I think that you showed some ignorance, however," said she, for the aspersion on her brother's cloth distinctly annoyed her, and his tone towards old age jarred on her as brutal. Could she stand this man? In her endeavour not to be a narrow-souled prig, had she been too rash?

He smiled persuasively.

"There, now! You see how it is," he said. "I show some ignorance! I say things that rub ladies the wrong way and ruffle up their feathers. That's just exactly where I want you to tip me a wink—I mean, to give me a hint. I don't wish to be offensive. I don't care to be received for my money like an African millionaire. The kind of smart folks who'll eat a man's dinner, with their tongues in their cheeks over his table manners, aren't the kind I want to know. I want to learn never to offend reasonable and refined gentlemen and ladies—the sort who can't be bought. I s'pose there are such, eh? I tell you I'm not prejudiced.

Tyler taught me the folly of prejudice. I want to see what's to be got out of the show at its best. You'll say 'Not much,' perhaps, after all. But till one tries one doesn't know, and one has only got one turn in this world, anyhow! I'm past my prime already. I couldn't sleep easy in my grave if I'd muffed too many chances."

Miss Dupins smiled.

"I should not fancy that you often had to reproach yourself on the score of missing chances," she responded.

"Not now, perhaps," he said earnestly. "But I fell out of the running terribly when I was younger. If it hadn't been for Tyler I shouldn't be sitting here having the cheek to talk to you, you know. It is a great pity for me that Tyler is dead."

Something in the simplicity of the last words touched Miss Dupins.

Mr. Cole's point of view was so far removed from her own that she had some difficulty in apprehending it, but that absolutely genuine expression of sorrow bridged a chasm. She greatly desired to say, "Who was Tyler?" but though she refrained from so doing out of delicacy, her eyes questioned him, and Mr. Cole at once felt her quickened sympathy.

"I should like to tell you a bit about my own history, though it isn't a pretty one," said he. "If we are going to be friendly, you might as well know something about me."

"Do you think it is wise to take a comparative stranger into any sort of confidence?" she asked hesitatingly.

Mr. Cole shot a quick, amused glance at her.

"Oh, it ain't going to be an *unabridged* edition, miss," he said dryly. "You may bet I shall leave out some of it."

Miss Dupins would have been disconcerted could she have guessed how often she amused this man. She pleased him, too, for a highly educated lady was a new type to him, and he was interested in life. Even her slight primness and inaccessibility pleased him. He was determined now to make friends with her.

## CHAPTER XII

"A HUNDRED years or so ago—it don't signify exactly how many—I had a wife," said Mr. Cole. "Her name was Barbara. She was a pretty enough country girl when we married, and she had a fine high spirit of her own. We quarrelled like cat and dog. It was mostly my fault—I drank, you see. I don't now, I've worsted it; but it made me a bad husband. She'd have done better without me, poor Barbara would, and when I was sober I knew it. In fact, she frequently said as much, for when I was sober I let her say what she liked, being generally down in the dumps then. Did you ever read a book that was written by a scribbling chap of the name of Stephen, or some such? It gave me a kind of nasty thrill when I came across it, for I knew it was true. It was about a wretched chap called Jekyll, who had a devil called Hyde bound up in the same body with him. Jekyll was a weak, soft kind, and Hyde was a rampageous, cursing bad lot. Jekyll got to loathe Hyde, and was in a dead funk of him, but in the end Hyde killed him—he *would* have naturally."

"Yes, of course I have read that awful story," said Miss Dupins. "Robert Louis Stevenson is celebrated, you know."

"Ah!" said he quickly, and nodded at her. "Ah! I was ridiculous just then, wasn't I? Any of your sort and education wouldn't have said 'a chap of the name of Stephen.' They'd have known all about Robert Louis Stevenson quite pat, I suppose? I'll remember that. But to go on. I'd had an especial bad bout

when it came over me one day that I was bound to go under, but that if I'd any decency left in me I needn't drag my wife under, too, and that that was what I was doing. It came to me as I stood at a window and watched Barbara carry a pail across Mary Anne Tavey's yard. She was stooping to one side, and she was draggled, and she looked old before her time, and I knew how I'd behaved, and I knew I should be as bad again, and so I cut loose and I went off altogether."

"You—you mean that you deserted her?"

"That's it; I deserted her, and a precious good thing it was for her. But after that——" He paused, and surveyed his hostess with a curious, half-humorous expression.

"'Pon my soul, it seems I have a jolly good lot of cheek to sit here talking about such things to you."

Miss Dupins blushed faintly.

"Why, I am not a young and inexperienced woman!" said she. "I have worked in a poor district since I was twenty. I know something of life."

He laughed then, rather disconcertingly; she did not quite understand why.

"In spite of the poor district, I'll slip the account of the next few years. I loafed and tramped, and old Hyde had been making the innings, you understand, when I drifted into the Union Infirmary at Sheffield, and it was jolly lucky for me I did drift there, for it was there I saw what you may call salvation."

"Oh!" said Miss Dupins, and, in spite of herself, her accent was one of disgust. Somehow she seemed to draw herself away from him, to be really shocked for the first time during this odd conversation. Cant was more abhorrent to her than any other form of evil under the sun. The emotional converted sinner of the platform never appealed to her. She always detested him on the rare occasions when she met him in her district. She was in reality rather narrow, though she fancied herself broadminded, but she was at least scrupulously, even severely, sincere. If Mr. Cole was

going to talk to her about salvation—well, that was more than she could bear.

He saw the movement of repulsion, and again smiled, with a touch of grim humour.

“I’d been convicted of sin when I saw Barbara walk across that yard. You may say I’d seen her every day, but you don’t see someone you are quarrelling with no more than you do someone you are in love with. I’d been convicted of sin then, and it had driven me lower down. I got salvation when I learnt how to grapple with the drink devil, and felt my grip strengthening. It was Tyler helped me. We went at the thing together. He was the best friend that ever I had, and I shouldn’t have pulled through without him. Tyler was a doctor and a man of education, but he had been as near as possible worsted by that same devil himself. Drink is a disease, of course, but, mind you, it is a disease of the will as well as of the body. What he said was this: that there ain’t—isn’t, I mean—that there isn’t much lasting use in tinkering the parts of the machine if the motive power is lacking; and, on the other hand, if a screw is loose all the power in the world may fail to make the machine act. He tightened the loose screw, as it were, but he made me understand that I’d got to put all the will I’d got left to the job, too. He’d a scathing tongue, had Tyler, but he was the right kind to have at one’s back in a bad place.

“It was while I was in the infirmary that it came into my head that the best thing to do would be to let poor Barbara hear that I was dead. I’ve always had a kind of a hankering after fair play, and it seemed that if I was going to cut loose and be free *she* ought to be free, too. Mind you, I’d no wish to marry anyone else. Bigamy wasn’t at all my game. No, no, I’d had enough of marriage. Well, if you set your mind on doing anything the means are never long wanting—at least, that’s been my experience. While I was turning the matter over in my head I happened on the right fellow to help me. His name was Johnson, and he and

I had been friendly at one time, years before, and now we tumbled against each other again, for there he was in the next bed to mine in the infirmary ward, but he was dying by inches—slow and sure, so to speak—while I'd had a bad bout, but was going to get well. Poor old Johnson! He was a chap who greatly enjoyed letter-writing, but he needed some talking to, for he had what you might call a fidgety conscience. I pointed out to him that, since I wasn't going back to Barbara, I'd far better be right down dead, for otherwise she'd be neither maid, wife, nor widow, and *that's* not at all convenient for a female, eh? I got him round to my view at last—I'm not a bad hand at persuading—and then he made up a letter to my widow. Quite touching it was, for he put his heart into it at last. I had to make him write it again, shorter, and not so pathetic. He was rather put out about that, for he was naturally what you might call a literary chap, though he never got into print. Johnson was supposed to write from France, for I knew Barbara would never think she could cross the Channel, but if I had turned up my toes in England she might be wanting to see after my grave. Johnson died soon after, which made it all safer, and I got the letter posted from Paris."

He came to a full stop, but his listener took no advantage of it. Her tongue was never over quick, and this extraordinary tale took her breath away. He waited a moment, but, finding she made no comment, he went on with his story.

"Well, Tyler and I got the better of the drink. We did the job, and if there's one I should be grateful to, it's him. I am, too. I never knew anyone fling himself into what he was doing in the way Tyler did. He'd go at it with a kind of fierceness and with every shred of him. That was what wore him out before he was fifty. After I got out of that infirmary, he took me into his service. He loathed women, did Tyler, and wouldn't have a petticoat in his house. I did all kinds of things; there wasn't any monotony about my day's work. At

first I dug a bit in his garden; afterwards I rolled pills and made up medicines. I must tell you I qualified for dispensing. He taught me a lot. I had been considered cleverish as a lad, but (as he said) I had been within an ace of soaking away what brains I had had to start with. He was just in time. At the end of three years you wouldn't have known me for the same man as I was at the beginning of 'em. In fact, I wasn't the same man. That's what I mean by conversion. If a chap turns right round and sets his face the other way, and lives quite another kind of a life to what he lived before, he isn't the same either in body or mind. If I was to be hanged now for anything I did before Tyler converted me, I should feel as if it wasn't fair, as if I was paying for what another fellow had done. But, mind you, when I talk of conversion I don't mean any religious nonsense. Tyler wasn't that sort, nor am I. I don't know anything about the kind of tales parsons tell. All I mean is that when one can say to one's senses, 'I'm master,' one isn't the same chap that one was when one was their slave."

"No doubt that is perfectly true," said Miss Dupins. She let the cheap sneer at religion and at parsons' tales pass unheeded this time. If she were going to be "friendly" with this man, she might try at a later stage of intercourse to bring him to broader and less prejudiced views, but she could not refrain from saying with some slight note of anxiety: "Nevertheless, I think that, though one may have ceased to commit former sins, and even have reached a stage at which they are no longer possible, yet one can never disown them in the sense of not paying for them, and I hope——"

She hesitated at this point, and Mr. Cole laughed outright.

"You hope I never did anything that I might be hanged for! No, no! I never did! At my worst I never did!"

His merry laugh was infectious, though a trifle over-

loud. His vitality was immense; it seemed to make the atmosphere of that virginal, austere dainty room fairly hum. Then he became grave again. His brown rugged face had great and sudden variety of expression that reminded her of someone else, but she could not pin down or name the memory.

"Tyler died. I can't talk about that. He left me money (he'd no relatives) and his blessing. He knew well what I was aiming at. He and I had tried a lot of experiments together. During the last year, before he got too ill to do much, we had all but got at the discovery I made the year after he died. He and I would have gone shares in it if only he could have lived. I called it 'Tylerine' after him. It seems a most foolish sort of idea, but sometimes I'm not sure but what I wouldn't rather have Tyler back than have the 'Tylerine.'"

"That isn't foolish, surely," said Miss Dupins gently.

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose it is," said he. "For there is a lot in 'Tylerine,' and to have plenty of money is such a very great thing. It means freedom to do what you like to do. It means being your own master—and other people's, too," he added naively. "You don't know the difference that makes. It's precious dull work otherwise, and it's dulness makes a chap drink. You don't understand that, though, and the money part of the story doesn't interest you. I never knew a woman—I beg your pardon, I mean a lady—ask fewer questions."

"I have been very much interested," said Miss Dupins, "and I should like to ask a question; but I do not wish to be inquisitive, for I think I dislike inquisitive people almost more than any other kind."

She spoke with fervour and with a sigh, for she had sometimes had reason to chide herself, in her capacity of head of a college, for being harder on underbred ways than on right down evil.

"Ask what you like," said Mr. Cole. "I'm not afraid you'll find out the secret of Tylerine from me. And if



you did, by —— I mean, if you did, I believe I should trust you with it."

"Thank you; but I was not thinking about Tylerine, but about something far more important," said she. "Since you tell me to ask, I will. Did you never go back to your deserted wife?"

Miss Dupins' heart actually quickened as she put the question, but a directness of purpose and a courage, which she undoubtedly possessed in spite of shyness, shone in her clear eyes as she looked straight at him.

"I should like to know that, because you have talked to me as if I were a friend. I could not give my friendship to someone who is deserting his wife."

He considered for a moment. He was taken aback. How much should he tell her? On the whole, he reflected that he had better not mention Babette, but, so far as he safely could, he preferred speaking the truth.

"Yes, I went back," he said gravely—"that is, after a fashion. When I left her I never meant to return, but I went back. It was years since I'd left her. You see, the fight to be master took time, and then, when I was sure of myself, I got on the track of my discovery. Tyler and I were constantly at it, and I didn't want Barbara then; Tyler would never have stood a woman being mixed up with us, and she would have been in the way. Women are all right when one has got what one's trying for, but when a chap's in the thick of a struggle he is better undistracted by 'em. That's what Tyler said, anyway."

"I think Dr. Tyler was very wrong," said Miss Dupins with some asperity.

"Right or wrong, after he got ill I couldn't have left him, but during that last three weeks before he died the thought of Barbara came back to me so strongly that it seemed as if she was about the place, especially of nights. I knew I'd got enough to keep her comfortably too. I shouldn't be dragging her down now. She had had a bad time with me before; it seemed I might make up. Two days after Tyler was

buried I went back to the place where I had left her, but she wasn't there. It was a queer thing, but I was just a month too late. She was married to another man. Served me jolly well right, eh?"

"What did you do?" Miss Dupins asked. She offered no apology for the question this time, it slipped out breathlessly.

"Nothing. I sloped away again. Barbara never knew I had come back," said he.

Miss Dupins clasped her fingers tightly together.

"But that was a sin, because she was your wife," she said; and she spoke severely because the words cost her an effort.

"A sin, eh?" said he thoughtfully. "Well, I don't know; but I think it would have been a d——d sight worse of me to have upset poor Barbara's apple-cart after all those years, and after deliberately leading her to suppose I was dead.

"Barbara was an honest woman, mind you, and she'd been strictly brought up. I wasn't good enough for her, but she'd never have had another happy moment if she'd thought she had been an unfaithful wife. She would have thought so if she'd had an inkling I was alive. I saw the fellow who married her. I stood behind a lamp-post and watched him come out of his house with her. A mooney-looking chap, but she seemed happy with him, which was more than she was with me, and he made her a better husband than I did. I felt like throttling him for the moment, too, but when you've learnt to master drink you've learnt to master other things. I'm glad I let her be."

"But if you are her husband, he is not. I believe that you ought to go back to your wife?" said she.

"Oh, you believe that?" said Mr. Cole. "Then how am I to set about it? Since you are so sure you had better tell me."

Miss Dupins shivered. Something in his manner jarred her.

"Perhaps I had no business to judge you," said she.

“Why shouldn’t you say what you think? I asked for it,” said he. “But as to going back to poor Barbara—well now, of course I know you’ve got high ideas—but don’t you believe that death cuts most ties, whether they be good, or whether they be bad?”

“Death? Is your wife dead?” she cried.

“Yes. Barbara, who was once my wife, is dead,” said he.

He got up and took a somewhat abrupt leave after that, leaving Miss Dupins very thoughtful.

## CHAPTER XIII

*Margaret.* "In the name of the boy-god, who plays at hood-man-blind with the Nurse, and cares not whom he catches, what is it you love?"

*Simon.* . . . "The poor fly,  
That makes short holy day in the sunbeam,  
And dies by some child's hand ; the feeble bird  
With little wings, yet greatly venturous  
In the upper sky ; the fish in th' other element  
That knows no touch of eloquence."

CHARLES LAMB.

ON a late November afternoon, Siegfried Durnham got out of the train at St. Paul's Station and made his way through the fog to a shop which sold slides for the microscope.

He had not seen anything of his relations since July. They had spent the summer in Scotland, while he had been botanizing in the flat, marshy country that surrounds Cambridge ; but now they had returned to Melbury Road, and he had come up to London to lay certain projects before his grandfather, and to make preparations for a long journey. Siegfried was apt to grudge hours spent in a town, but to-day he was glad to be back. There had been moments during the summer when an unbidden image had flitted in and out of his mind as a dragon-fly flits among leaves, an elusive yet insistent vision that had beguiled and disturbed him. Again, there had been moments when a low, gurgling note of laughter had haunted his ear, filling him with absurd longing, and when a sound of sobbing had knocked at the door of his heart, till it had been all he could do not to take the train north. All that, of course, was very absurd, but as Siegfried walked

through the fog it occurred to him that there would be nothing ridiculous in taking a small present to Babette, something that might bring that flash of quickened delight into her eyes, and make her lips part in a smile. It would be a pleasant and cousinly thing to do, and the idea prompted him to give the contents of shop-windows an attention which he had never before bestowed on them.

He paused presently before the window of a second-hand furniture dealer's and pawnshop in a narrow street. A trefoil of opals caught his eye. Opals were surely pre-eminently appropriate to Babette, who was certainly a person of many colours, but this trefoil seemed somehow especially connected with her. How was it that he felt as if it were hers already? He answered himself with deepened interest. Why, it was because he had seen this very ornament, or one exactly like it, as she stood singing by the piano on the evening of their first meeting.

Siegfried had an accurate and trustworthy memory. He possessed the scientific mind that collects facts patiently, and is never in too great a hurry to deduce conclusions.

He did not hurry to a conclusion now, but nevertheless his facts were linking themselves in consecutive order. He went into the shop and asked to look at the opal ornament. The trefoil depended from a very fine gold chain that was set at intervals with opals. He remembered the chain, too.

"It's worth more than I'm asking. Your lady will be pleased with it, for *they* know what's what, eh, sir?" said Aaron Schonenwetter.

He dangled the pretty thing on a fat thumb before the customer's eyes. The colours changed and flashed in the light of the gas-jet above the counter. He was a fair, corpulent old Jew, whose keen small eyes had spied many a bargain, had appraised both men and things for many a year. Siegfried unreasonably disliked seeing that dainty trinket in coarse hands.

"I should like to examine it, please," said he, and so rescued it.

There were initials on the clasp. They were delicately chased, and would have escaped a less close observation. They were "B. R." Siegfried had scarcely needed their confirmation.

"How much?" said he.

"Five pound over this counter," said Aaron Schonenwetter. "But you wouldn't get it in Bond Street for less than four times that money. It's going dirt cheap."

"Why so? You don't carry on business by making presents to your customers?" said Siegfried.

Aaron Schonenwetter chuckled.

"No, no, I don't say I do that. My pretty ones have damaged reputations, that's all. They ain't a bit the worse for it in reality, though. These stones haven't a colour the less than when they were sold to my lord in Bond Street for sixteen guineas. Prejudice! all prejudice of course! but second-'and *is* second-'and whether it's ladies or jewels!"

The trick of philosophising over his wares was growing on the old man, for, indeed, the keeping of a pawnshop is a calling that tends towards that habit. How many times are jewels paid for? They outlast owner after owner. Their sheeny brightness is undimmed when the beauty they adorned is in the grave. Even family heirlooms outlast the families that possessed them. The trinkets of a queen reach the open marketplace, though they have been bought with blood as well as with gold. Hearts are bartered, nations fight for diamonds, and then again, they may be flung away "dirt cheap," like women with damaged reputations.

Those words had jarred on Siegfried, but he made no comment; he only tucked the little packet containing Babette's trinket carefully away in his pocket, and went on his way home.

Home was not a very comfortable place to Siegfried, but he was, nevertheless, quite fond of his family, and especially of his mother. It would never have occurred

to him to be otherwise, for he belonged to that satisfactory type of Englishman who takes his family affection (as he takes his love for his country, or his clean and upright code of ethics), so much for granted, that any discussion about it strikes him as unnecessary, and even as somewhat indecent.

But though reticent, the young man was not altogether dense; he had not been many hours at home before it was borne in on him that all was not as it had been!

Babette was no longer a source of undiluted joy to her grandfather and her Aunt Julie, while her Aunt Harriet, who had always so unaccountably disliked her, now eyed her with a distrust that had in it the premonition of coming justification.

Babette had grown thin and had lost her pretty looks. Her cheek bones showed too plainly; she was nervous and jumpy. She was often cross and excited over trifles, and then absurdly cast down at her own shortcomings. Mrs. Durnham observed the irritable temper and the quick exaggerated penitence with a silent but unmerciful aversion. Miss Redstone, who had once indulged and adored, now lectured and reproved too constantly. Only Sir Hubert was consistently kind, but even he was graver and somewhat worried by these feminine vagaries.

Babette was pleased to see Siegfried. He came to her as a relief and amusement. She was secretly tickled by his unlikeness to his family and by the way in which he would cut through fine-spun theories with a matter-of-fact simplicity that seemed at times almost foolishness. He had but scanty understanding of either art or literature, and only his innate modesty prevented his being an out and out Philistine! He would cheerfully own to appalling preferences in pictures, and music, and books. He was truthful to a fault. His undeviating honesty fascinated poor Babette, who had herself given up veracity as a virtue unattainable by the needy, but who was increasingly aware of the magnitude of her loss.

Their companionship became daily more friendly, though now and again Babette would fling out rather pathetic warnings.

"You wouldn't like me if you knew all about me! You'd be shocked to death! No, we can't be *real* friends because *I* can't have a real friend. Why not? Oh, I can't explain to you why not!"

Siegfried never laughed away these protests; he listened to them quietly, but they made no whit of difference to the quality of his friendship. He sought her companionship more and more; but unobtrusively. He was so unsentimental that it did not occur to Babette that he was in love with her. She believed herself to have a wide experience of life, but, in fact, Siegfried sometimes smiled to himself at her innocence. She believed herself to be an arch-hypocrite, but she revealed that she had a secret a dozen times at least during their intercourse.

"I suppose *you* always tell the exact truth," she said once, wistfully. "It must make one feel very clean and good to always do that."

"Well now, I don't know that I do," he replied, after a moment's consideration. "I don't tell lies. That doesn't do. It isn't cricket; but I often think a lot of things I don't say—quite a lot!"

Babette laughed.

"Yes, I know! I see you thinking them. To-day at lunch, for example, when Aunt Julie was raving over that new artist. It annoys you when people gush."

Siegfried reflected again.

"Well now, I believe it does," he owned, but added with the humility which redeemed him from priggishness: "But, of course, I know I don't understand lots of things that people like my grandfather and Aunt Julie enjoy and appreciate. I *am* rather stupid, you know."

Babette shook her head.

"No, I don't know. I don't believe you are stupid. You are different, that's all! You would make a good judge. You see things fairly."



The young man shook his head. "I don't want to sit on a woolsack. Not for this child, thanks!" said he.

"But what in the world do you want? I wish you'd tell me!" Babette cried.

His grandfather had asked the same question, and Siegfried had drawn in his horns, so to speak, and replied most unsatisfactorily. He did not draw in his horns now; on the contrary, he was flattered. In spite of his distrust of sentiment and shyness of expression, his dislike of gush and his horror of exaggeration, there was no doubt that he found pleasure in Babette, who expressed herself vividly, who frequently exaggerated unblushingly, and who was feminine to the tips of her fingers.

"Why, do you care about what I want? Come now! That's awfully jolly of you," said he.

She nodded, looking at him with the friendliest interest. They were sitting, the two together by the library-fire. The room seemed cosier when Babette was in it! Miss Redstone was at a concert and Mrs. Durnham had gone out to tea. Siegfried warmed to confidence.

"What I want, what I really want, is to go as naturalist to this new expedition that's starting for the Antarctic. I've not got the official announcement yet—but I'm pretty sure it's all right."

"Ah, you'll like that! That means a great deal to you?" said she.

"Well, rather! The chance of it is far and away the best thing that's ever happened to me except——"

"Yes—except?"

"Except when I found out something about the larvæ of ——, but there, girls don't care about those things."

"I am not 'girls'; I am Babette, and there never were two of us alike," said Babette, with her funny little smile. "I am so glad you see a good chance of getting what you want, and I am so sorry you are bent on going far away! I suppose you will sit under a big white

umbrella lined with green on burning hot sand, and study ant-heaps!"

"The Antarctic's cold, you know," said Siegfried, with a grin.

His mother had often told him that Babette was only half educated, but he did not like her the less for that.

Babette blushed. "Oh, to be sure, so it is! Well then, I suppose you'll sit on the edge of an iceberg and take notes about the ways of the Arctic fish. Is that kind of interest more interesting than anything else in all the world to you, Siegfried?"

"Well now, I suppose so," said he indifferently.

"You're lucky," said Babette, sighing.

Siegfried nodded.

"Why, yes. I shouldn't care to be alive if it wasn't for that," he said. "You see, I'm not poetical or literary, and yet I'm not an ambitious or pushing kind of chap either. I don't care about being famous, and I never have wanted to follow any of the lines granddad has suggested to me. I hated the idea of being in the army! There'd be no time to attend to anything I really care about in the army! I should have been awfully sold if I had passed for it. Granddad was a bit disappointed in me, but it wouldn't have done, you know. Besides, luckily I was under size at sixteen. I grew up slowly.

"Then they sent me to Cambridge, and there I got the hang of things. I began to study botany and zoology seriously. Being so slow it hadn't occurred to me before that the sort of things I liked might be work; I'd looked upon them as play. I don't suppose you could understand how slowly it dawned on me that I might put all the elbow-grease I could into *that* line without feeling it was wrong. It was really all right. You can't think what a relief it was! It's awfully jolly to get on the right tack. It's like sailing with the wind instead of against it. I took my degree last year, you know, and—— oh, well! I don't suppose you care to hear me gassing on about myself and that."

"I care immensely," said Babette eagerly. "I always care to hear about people, just as much as you like to find out funny little creatures that live in green water. People are never dull to me. Go on—you took your degree last year, and——"

"And I read a paper—seems rather ridiculous—but I read a paper to the C.M.H. Society about those insects that live in the stuff that country-people call cuckoo-spit. Out of sheer luck it happened that Professor Dakin was there. You'll have heard of him?" (Babette had not, but she nodded encouragingly.) "And he talked a lot to me afterwards. We made friends after that—sounds awful cheek to call myself his friend you'll say—and through him I've got this chance. Such luck from first to last, eh? It nearly takes my breath away."

His plain face was lit up with unwonted enthusiasm.

"Now I know how much you care I'll never laugh at your beetles again," cried Babette.

"Bless you, I never mind; anyone may laugh," Siegfried replied cheerfully. "Not but what it's jolly of you to be interested and that."

"Oh, I love to hear about other people's affairs. It makes me forget my own bothers for the time," said she sighing.

Siegfried poked the fire diligently, and addressing the poker, and carefully turning his head from her, said:

"I suppose now, you couldn't feel inclined to tell me about them—the bothers, I mean?"

Babette hesitated; then a bitter remembrance swept over her and she shook her head.

"No, no! I'd better not. I know that I had better not, for I can't bear it when people are shocked, and begin to despise and hate me."

"They would never do that," said he, still addressing the poker.

"Wouldn't they? That's all you know about it! But if you ever tumble down into a muddy place you'll find out something else," said Babette. "You'll find out that even the person who was supposed to like you very

much only wants to get away as quickly as possible, for fear of being pulled in too! And then, when you think it all over, you'll agree that it was right and natural, and that will be the worst of it. Mud *isn't* nice. It's really very horrible indeed."

Siegfried examined the poker in silence, and rubbed a speck of rust with his sleeve. He reddened slightly under his freckles.

After a minute's rather painful pause, Babette leant forward and just touched his shoulder.

"I say horrid things when I am miserable, and it's a shame, for you are so kind! I think you are always kind, Siegfried."

"Come now, I'm not so bad as that," said he. He rubbed the spot of rust with energy. "A fellow who is always kind is no good," he said. "If I were to meet the chap who was supposed to like you, and who ran away when you told him the truth, I shouldn't go in for being kind and that."

"You didn't suppose I was talking about a man, did you?" said Babette quickly.

Siegfried put down the poker and looked thoughtfully at her.

"Well, no," he said slowly. "I didn't, for I never did think him much of a man."

And at that juncture the *tête-à-tête* was interrupted.

Mrs. Durnham came into the room, and Babette jumped up quickly to offer her Aunt Harriet the arm-chair, to relieve her of her cloak and to make fresh tea. The girl was naturally serviceable, but Mrs. Durnham received her service with latent mistrust. She distrusted all that Babette said, and everything that she did.

"I thought that you had declared yourself too tired to come downstairs," said Mrs. Durnham.

"Yes; but when I heard Siegfried come in I thought I might just as well pick myself up and go to make his tea for him," Babette answered mischievously.

She was quite aware that Siegfried's mother disapproved of this cousinly friendship, and she threw

down her light gauntlet with half-playful defiance. But Mrs. Durnham was too dignified to bandy words with an upstart, and the silence made Babette momentarily uncomfortable.

"She hates me! And why, after all, need anyone hate me?" the girl thought.

"I feel as if you were willing me out of the room, Aunt Harriet," she cried impulsively. "I suppose you want to be alone with Siegfried. Why don't you say so? You might just as well say, 'Do take yourself off! You're in my way.' Of course I'll go."

"That appears to me to be a foolish, exaggerated way of speaking, Babette," said Mrs. Durnham gravely, but Babette was out of the room before the slow words had passed her lips.

Her son faced her squarely. "Come now, mother, why is it that you dislike Babette so much?" he asked.

Mrs. Durnham was a very sincere woman. It was impossible to her to take refuge in evasion. She could not say, "I do not dislike her," and he repeated the question.

Then, being forced to reply, she said gravely: "It is because I distrust her, but the time is hardly ripe for telling you why."

He looked up with a quick glint in his eyes.

"I trust her," he said. But the little parcel with the opals seemed to burn in his breast-pocket. "I should not at all wonder if she were in the devil of a mess, all the same," he added.

"Good girls do not get into the devil of a mess, Siegfried." The words came with the accent of authority.

Siegfried smiled doubtfully.

"Don't they? Good boys do sometimes. They get into messes, but if there's stuff in them they come out the right side. I say, mother, suppose she were in the devil of a mess, you would stand by her, would you not, and trust to her biting her way out alive?"

"Trust to *what*?"

His mother regarded Siegfried momentarily as if he were a mild lunatic.

"To her biting her way out alive," he repeated. "That is what they do, you know. Moths and that. The creature spins itself up, and has an awfully close time developing its organs and its wings and so on, and then, when it's ready, it bites its way out. Some of 'em don't; they get nipped by the cold, or eaten or something; but I believe *she* will."

"I don't understand what you are talking about, and I doubt if you understand yourself," said Mrs. Durnham in some exasperation.

"One must have a bit of patience. You can't hurry them up. It never does to interfere and hurry. If you'd just give her a lot of patience and confidence——"

"Why should I?" interrupted Mrs. Durnham. "I see no reason whatever for having any confidence in Babette. Quite the contrary!"

A very unusual emotion seemed to possess Siegfried. He was not a demonstrative son, but he put his hand for a second on his mother's.

"Come now, I suppose you're fond of me and that," said he.

Mrs. Durnham drew her hand away. She did not wish to understand all that that unexpected appeal implied. It roused in her a fierce hot wave of dismayed anger.

"Is the fact of my loving my only son a reason why I should pander to deceit?" she asked sternly.

"Oh no," said Siegfried; "I should not pander to deceit, you know. I should only stand by and be ready to help her. I don't know how it's to be done, for I don't see exactly what it all means yet; but if one believes in her——"

"I do not," said Mrs. Durnham.

"Oh, well, then, never mind. There's no use in talking about it. There never is any use in talking," said Siegfried.

It was not a satisfactory conclusion.

Mrs. Durnham was aware that she had not much influence over her son. None of his family had. In a quiet, unaggressive manner he always had been obstinately set on his own way. He was obstinately "set" now. He was determined to champion that dangerous minx who had beguiled his grandfather, and for whom her own dislike increased every day. Surely she had been bound to warn him? Surely she had been right? Yet she had an uneasy consciousness that she had been put in the wrong, and that she had missed an exceptional chance. It was rarely that Siegfried appealed to anyone. Her mind worked slowly, and her anger had clouded it, but she could not be satisfied to let the matter rest there. She tried to reopen the subject.

"I did not mean to speak too soon, but I do not wish you to imagine that I am prejudiced. If you like I will explain to you why I distrust that girl," she said.

Siegfried shook his head.

"No, I don't want to hear, thank you. Just for the minute I fancied that you'd help, because, being a woman and that, you might understand things, and—and——" He stammered and laughed. "It doesn't matter what I fancied. I was a silly ass! Don't you worry, mother. I'll just play this game off my own bat."

And after that there was no getting any more out of him.

## CHAPTER XIV

WE most of us know how a subject that possesses our minds is apt to perform that very odd feat, which we call "getting in the air." It will emerge suddenly from other people's mouths. It will appear in print, or lie in wait in an envelope. It will take to itself form again and again.

Siegfried's thoughts were a good deal occupied by the discovery he had made in the Jew's shop. During dinner Sir Hubert looked across at Babette, and said suddenly:

"Why do you not wear the opals which I gave you, Baby? What have you done with them?"

"Have I not worn them lately?" said Babette vaguely.

"You have not worn them since we came back to town in October. At one time you wore them every night," said Mrs. Durnham.

Sir Hubert had asked the question casually, but Mrs. Durnham's slow utterance seemed to hold some meaning of import, to lay a heavier stress on the matter.

Miss Redstone looked annoyed.

"Now I do trust you have not lost that, too!" she cried. "You are really a most careless child. For my own part, I trust everyone. I never lock a box or a drawer, but all the same, I do not mislay the things that have been given to me. It would go to my heart to lose the gifts of love."

"Why, what else has she lost?" asked Sir Hubert quickly. "Are you so very careless, granddaughter?"

His bright dark eyes were bent on Babette searchingly, but their expression softened as she smiled back



at him. Had Babette confessed that she had lost every possession in the world, he would have forgiven her.

"Oh, not so very, granddad," said she.

"Come, that's right, for it does not do to be too confiding," said he. "It puts temptation in the way of other people. You shouldn't leave all your boxes unlocked, Julie. It is most unwise of you. I am glad your opals are safe, my dear, for I want you to wear them to-morrow when we dine out together."

Babette's hand shook so that she spilt her soup as she lifted her spoon to her mouth.

Mrs. Durnham made her observation aloud.

"Why are you so nervous, Babette?"

Again her deep voice seemed charged with meaning, but Siegfried interposed with a matter-of-fact question.

"Where are you and Babette off to, grandfather? You're becoming most frightfully young and gay, you know!"

Now Sir Hubert did not quite like the modern fashion of familiar address from his grandson. A granddaughter wore another pair of shoes altogether.

"I am not in my second childhood yet," he said tartly. "But, no doubt, old fellows like myself entertain more enthusiasm both for work and play than does your generation. I am going to take Babette to dine with Miss Dupins, and, after dinner, we are all going on to the *soirée* given by the Committee of — House. Your Aunt Julie was invited, but she is engaged that night, so I asked leave to bring this little baggage instead. I believe we are to meet some City magnate — a chap who has invented a substitute for rubber. He doesn't sound as if he were much in Miss Dupins' line. She wrote to me that she feared it might be a dull dinner for you, Baby, for we should all be too old for you, but I assured her that you didn't know what the word boredom meant."

"I am sure it will be quite exciting," cried Babette. "And, anyhow, I always enjoy going out with you, granddad."

But, in spite of her gay response, her heart sank like lead, and she felt sick with apprehension, for she had a presentiment that Atropos was about to bring the shears together with a click, and that her poor little life would be cut mercilessly in twain. The episode took away her appetite, and Sir Hubert's kind eyes regarded her anxiously.

"That child is too easily put off her balance," he said to Siegfried, when the ladies had gone upstairs. "Your mother is inclined to be hard on her, but, of course, it is absurd that she should be unable to finish her dinner because she has been reproved for carelessness. She never sulks, but, as Julie says, she is far too sensitive. I think I shall get Dr. Bowlley to have a look at her."

"Oh, I shouldn't bother with doctors. They wouldn't be any good," said Siegfried.

"You would never bother yourself about anything," said his grandfather.

There was a pause, and then Siegfried drew a packet out of his pocket.

"I want to tell you about an offer I've had," said he. "You wouldn't mind my going to the Antarctic, would you? If you'd just read through those papers you'll see all about it, granddad. I got the final clincher only this afternoon. It's a great bit of luck, isn't it?"

Sir Hubert read the "final clincher" with a puzzled expression, then put it down, and slowly perused the other papers. His amazement grew.

"Those are only a sort of testimonial. One from the old Master of Balliol, and one from Professor Dakin—and some other Johnnies you know," said Siegfried.

"But—but these men seem to think extraordinarily well of you," said his grandfather.

"Professor Dakin thinks a jolly lot better of me than I deserve," Siegfried remarked. "I've been seeing about my kit and that."

"Seeing about your kit?" repeated Sir Hubert, in some bewilderment. "But I thought you said you only got this letter by this evening's post?"

"Oh, I had a hint that I might get the offer, so I began to get ready."

"Have you spoken to your mother about it?"

"No, not yet. There's no use in talking about a thing before one is sure that it's likely to come off."

Sir Hubert re-read the letters. "But I had no idea. I can't make it all out. What does he mean by your exceptional abilities? You never told *me* you had exceptional abilities."

"Well, now, I suppose it must seem a rotten joke," Siegfried owned. "Still, granddad, you've always known that that's the line I've been keen on."

"It's so sudden," said the old man. "I don't know that I want my only grandson to go rushing off like this. And why haven't I been led to take this taste of yours more seriously? Why, if they think so much of you, why on earth didn't you *say* so before, Siegfried? You are so extremely reticent that it is impossible to understand that—that you have exceptional ability."

"Come, now, I expect that's the professor's way of putting it," said the young man modestly. "Don't let it worry you, granddad. Of course there isn't anything out of the ordinary way about me. I didn't set out to be reticent, either. It was just that I got out of the way of holding forth about what I am interested in, because, you see, my sort of game wouldn't be any fun to any of you. I can see that jolly well. But it's nobody's fault. I told Babette I was expecting this offer, but nobody else has heard about it yet."

"Babette! Why, surely that little thing knows nothing about such matters, or has she a remarkable turn for natural history also?" his grandfather asked, somewhat testily.

Siegfried, who had a strong sense of humour, grinned. There was something funny about the way in which the old gentleman took the affair.

"Oh no! Babette thought I'd be grilled alive at the South Pole; but—well, it's pleasant to tell her anything, for she's so jolly sympathetic and that."

Sir Hubert frowned. A most unwelcome thought crossed his mind. No philandering between first cousins could possibly be allowed.

"Yes, that child is sympathetic to everyone—it's her way," he said, rather shortly.

Siegfried agreed with him cordially.

"So she is. I say, granddad, she fits in wonderfully, doesn't she? I'm awfully glad she has come to live here."

"Your mother doesn't seem to take to Babette," the old man replied. "I am sometimes afraid that your mother fancies that I am foolishly fond of the child, that I prefer her to you, my boy, which is an absurd idea, for I hope I am a just man."

Siegfried laughed outright—a frank, cheerful, and entirely unembarrassed laugh.

"Why, granddad, I should jolly well hope you did! Anyone who was not stone blind and deaf as a post *would* prefer Babette to me! But, I say, it's jolly lucky she's here just now, because what I feel is just this: it won't matter about your grandson rushing off to the South Pole, you know, so long as you've got your granddaughter safe at home."

The young man had spoken in absolute good faith; no trace of jealousy had ever entered into his composition, and his appreciation was disarming in its simplicity; but his grandfather glanced sharply at him, with just a momentary suspicion that the frankness was put on. Sir Hubert was wrong, but the artistic nature, with its need of self-expression, finds the absolute unconsciousness of the plain man baffling at times.

The question that surged and beat in Babette's brain all through the next day found pitying echo in Siegfried's. He watched, but never coldly.

"What shall I do? what shall I do?" she cried to herself; and there were moments when he longed to answer encouragingly: "Oh, you'll do the straight thing in the end, and you'll get out."

The lagging hours moved terror-laden, and there was

fear in the very sound of her laughter. Yet no one but Siegfried, and perhaps Siegfried's mother, knew that. When we have secrets it is best to keep clear of those who love us too well and of those who hate us. Gentle homely affection and mild dislike are both safer companions; but passion has its own intuition, even though at times it may be blind.

When the chimes sounded for dressing-time their soft notes were like the summons to execution. Babette mounted the stairs laggingly, but her fancy flew on before, and pictured to her how Hannah would ask for the key of her jewel-case, and how she would say, "Oh, dear, I believe I've lost that key, Hannah!"

"It is unwise to leave your boxes unlocked," Sir Hubert had said. Yes, indeed, very unwise when they hold nothing but shameful emptiness!

And at that thought shame as well as terror touched Babette. All these honest and honourable people had no need to lock up anything, but she—she sedulously hid an empty fraud! She had often conciliated an easy-going conscience by the plea that in reality—that is, by education and taste—she belonged to her step-father's people, but now she felt bitterly aware that she was more truly akin to the grabbing creature that lurked in the darkness than she was to them.

"But I do not know what to do! There is no way out!" she cried. She spoke aloud, though unwittingly, and when someone answered her she turned with a frightened start.

"Well now, but there must have been a way in," said Siegfried.

The carpets were thick and Babette was preoccupied. She had not heard his step behind her.

"Oh, Siegfried, why do you startle me so!" she cried. She tried to laugh, but the laughter was not quite successful.

"Why do people think it is funny to make other people jump?" she said, rather crossly. "It isn't funny at all!"

"Not at all," he agreed. "I wasn't trying to be funny; I was only saying what I thought. To get out one has to open the door the other way. For example, if one's got into a scrape by being drunk, one has to get out by being teetotal. A beastly nuisance that must be, too! If one's got into debt by extravagance, one has to get straight by scrimping, unless one's got soft-hearted rich relations, and so on."

He did not add, if one has told lies one must declare the truth, but Babette saw the sequence, sighed heavily, and shook her head.

"Nothing is ever as simple as all that," said she. "But I am in a scrape. That's true, anyhow."

"I'm sorry for it," said Siegfried.

"I haven't got my opals, and there is going to be such a fuss about them"—with a sudden burst of confidence. "I shall come down late, with my cloak on, so that *perhaps* there won't be questions; but I feel in my bones that Aunt Harriet won't be put off. I've been dreading what is coming all day."

"I don't see that coming down late will do much good."

"No; but if one is drowning one catches at any plank, even though one knows one will have to let go in the end," said Babette, with a sad little smile.

Siegfried put his hand in his pocket, drew out the parcel that had been burning there, and put it into her hand.

"There! I was thinking it might be rather jolly to buy a present for you, when I saw this," he said.

Babette unrolled the paper listlessly, then caught her breath, and sat suddenly down on the stairs. Her opals lay on her lap, but to Siegfried's dismay she turned her head away, leaning it against the banisters, and fairly sobbed.

"Well now, I supposed you'd be rather pleased," said he.

"Rather pleased—*rather!*" gasped Babette.

The young man stood silently watching her. It was the oddest beginning of a courtship, but his sympathy

grew apace, and, as he watched, he realized several facts quite clearly.

He realized that he meant to be on her side whatever happened, that he trusted her in spite of whatever she had done. That he would be willing to give quite a great deal to see her clear of the webs that hampered her, and that he was not going to force or hurry her in any way.

Babette recovered her breath, and regarded him with grateful and wet eyes.

"You must think me an idiot, but it is such a relief that I can't help crying," she said. "There won't be any dreadful scene now. I shall just sail into the room quite gaily, with granddad's present displayed on my neck. Oh, well, it is *your* present too now, but '—she had the grace to blush—"but I can't tell them that, can I?"

He made no answer.

"You must wonder how they got into a shop. It is kind of you not to ask any questions; anyone else would ask dozens."

"I can wait," said he. "Look here, Babette; you will be awfully late if you don't go to dress, and grandfather can't wait."

Emotions seemed to chase each other across the girl's tear-stained face.

"Granddad is so good," said she, "and he is fond of me. He is fonder of me than anyone has been since—since *he* died. I don't want to hurt granddad; I can't bear to. Siegfried, I am dreadfully unhappy (except when I forget about it all), and I deserve to be, because I am a wicked person. When I first came here I was usually enjoying myself and only unhappy sometimes, but now it's the other way round. Yet, how can I tell the truth now? I think, to hurt other people is worse than being dishonest and only hurting one's own tiresome soul, if one has got one (and I am never sure whether I have got one, anyhow, are you?), so I don't see what I can do."

"Oh, you will see—I bet you will," said Siegfried cheerfully.

Babette looked at him inquiringly.

"What do you think about it all?" she asked.

"Well, now, I think truth matters most awfully. If you don't respect it, it will crush you," he said deliberately. "I am not talking about souls and morals and that; I am only saying what I know. I know that if one hasn't been exactly accurate in one's observations, if one has overlooked anything, or tried to pare facts down so as to make them fit pet theories, the truth will knock a hole through one's boat and sink it. What you say sounds all right—I mean, about its being worse to hurt someone else by telling the truth than to hurt oneself by telling lies; but that never is the real position. It may look like that, but if one deceives anyone, one gives worse trouble in the end. Truth doesn't alter for us; it stands fast like a rock, and you are bound to run on it sooner or later. It's only a question of time. The people you deceive will run on it, too. It gives a nasty jar to break against it like that. It's strong, like"—he grew red with unaccustomed earnestness—"like God, I suppose. To me it just *is* God; that's why it gives one such an awfully keen pleasure when one works to discover it. To throw dust in people's eyes is the worst turn you can do them, especially if you think you do it to save them pain."

"Oh," said Babette, "then you'd tell the truth at any price?"

"It's your way out," said he; "but, of course, you must see it for yourself before you can take it."

"You won't give away anything I've said to you, will you? Suppose someone asked you if I had ever confided anything to you, and suppose I *had* told you that I had committed a crime—something really very bad that I might even be put in prison for? Of course, I am only supposing."

"Oh, I should lie like a tinker," said Siegfried cheerfully, "for no one has any business to ask me to break



confidence. I'd shoot at a burglar who tried to break into my house, too. All the same, I don't go about shooting or telling lies."

Babette fingered her opals in silence for a moment.

"Thank you very much for bringing these back to me," she said at last.

"You needn't thank me, for that isn't the way out; but you'll find it—of course, you will find it," said Siegfried.

## CHAPTER XV

A REAL friendship struck its roots between Miss Dupins and Mr. Cole. He went to see her many times after that foggy afternoon on which he had paid his first visit to the quaint, austere little house in Chelsea. He liked her. He liked her delicate sense of honour, her uprightness, her idealism. There was no sentimentality between them, only the added "gentleness" that gives charm to a friendship between a man and a woman. Sometimes he laughed when he thought of her sayings (but he never laughed unkindly); sometimes she sighed when she thought of his, but never without sympathy. There was no doubt that they reciprocally enlivened each other. One day he evinced a simple, almost childlike desire to enter what he called "good society," in order that he might enjoy and take part in what he called "good talk."

"For you see," he explained, "one should go to the special people for particular goods. When I want a special kind of fine drawn silver wire, I write to the firm that supplies that article. If I wanted theological arguments, I should try to get at the Archbishop or the Pope. Now, on thinking it over, I see the use of society is that it sifts and discloses and separates ideas in a particular, clean, fine, clever kind of way, eh? I'm not prejudiced. Leastways, I try not to be, and I see that *is* useful. I'd like to mix in the play for once; I'd like to hear the ladies taking part in the arguments. Our women can't argue. They assert (when they get the chance) and they scold and they coax, but they can't argue. I want to hear the very best of good talk."

Miss Dupins felt very dubious over the possibility of satisfying this aspiration, and with his usual quickness he saw that she was visited by some misgiving.

"You are thinking I am not yet fit for fine folk—not up to the standard? Well, you must coach me a bit more, and then I shall pass," he said good-humouredly.

But that was not the right interpretation of her thought. For once he had made a bad shot. In truth she had been wondering whether the "fine folk" would quite come up to his expectations rather than whether he would be up to theirs.

She turned the matter over in her mind after he left, considering which of her friends she could advantageously invite to meet him. She would ask no one who would be too much jarred or surprised by his manners, nor any who would accept and make much of him merely for the sake of his money. She was still thoughtfully considering the matter when her father paid her a visit, and interrupted her cogitations. It occurred to her as she returned his greeting that she might possibly ask him to dinner—that is, if she could be quite sure that the cooking would be up to his standard, for Mr. Dupins had a delicately trained taste, and anything short of the best was repugnant to him.

He was a distinguished-looking old gentleman, alert and extraordinarily upright for his years, which numbered over seventy. He walked stiffly from the results of a hunting accident, but he still rode well, and his nerve was unimpaired. His heavy cavalry moustache hid a mouth that was both weak and obstinate, but which had a delightfully humorous twitch about it. In her youth Laura Dupins had hankered wistfully after her father's heart; she would very much have liked to have found a key and entrance to it, but perhaps the essence of middle age lies in the recognizing the futility of some aspirations. She was no longer young. He had a charmingly affectionate and playful manner to her, but it bothered him to be in any way tied by an intimate relationship.

For many years he had lived apart from his wife,

although there had been no vulgar scandal or legal separation. For a short time after that lady's death he had been somewhat disturbed by the suspicion that Laura might try to insist on making a home for and with him. It had been a great relief to him when she discovered his dread, and without any fuss or scene quietly proceeded to provide for herself. He had applauded her resolution most heartily, had taken quite a kindly, if patronizing, interest in her subsequent career, and they had always remained on the best of terms in consequence. At any rate *he* considered them the best of terms, and she was too sensible a woman to contradict him.

Colonel Dupins had inherited a family place and a fairly comfortable fortune. He had sold the place, and the fortune had dwindled considerably. He allowed his daughter £300 a year, which she assured him was more than sufficient for her wants in addition to the salary which she earned. In his own peculiar way he was quite proud of her.

"Well, and how are you, my Lauristina?"

Miss Dupins returned his greeting, and pulled the chair he approved of into the position he liked. It was entirely owing to him that she possessed one thoroughly comfortable chair.

"Isn't it a very bad day for you to be out in, father?" she asked.

He frowned. He hated to be reminded of his ailments.

"The weather was made for man, not man for the weather," said he. "If you pay no attention it does not affect you, but if once you give way to it, you may become a perfect weather-glass! I advise you never to give way to it, my love."

"But you are walking more stiffly to-day. Is the rheumatism in your hip worse?" she ventured.

"Tch—tch! We don't talk about such matters," said he, exactly as if she had been some naughty child who had transgressed "drawing-room etiquette" by a malapropos remark.

He frequently addressed his middle-aged daughter in

that tone if she said anything that annoyed him, and the headmistress of the college never knew how to cope with it. With his son, Colonel Dupins was not on speaking terms.

"And who is the funny chap I met going out as I came in?" he asked, with an air of urbanely looking over Laura's lapse from good manners. "*Quite* a funny chap, eh?"

Miss Dupins laughed.

"Oh, that was Mr. Cole, the inventor of the substitute for indiarubber. I met him at that French boarding-house at Compiègne. Since then he has become quite a notable person."

Colonel Dupins rubbed his hands together.

"Famous, famous!" he said. "Some of those funny chaps hit on the most wonderful things! I'll be bound he makes his fortune! They are the sort who get hold of the money nowadays. The trouble is they don't know what to do next when the pile is collected."

"That is true," said Miss Dupins thoughtfully. "And it is very difficult to arrive at a solution of the problem. Philanthropy seems to do more harm than good. To squander on selfish indulgence is clearly wrong and despicable. The Socialistic idea would lead us back to Cæsarism and officialism—and——"

She checked herself and blushed, seeing the left corner of the old gentleman's moustache twitch upwards with a slight effect of derision.

"Quite so—quite so!" he said. "There's only one way out of the difficulty that I can see. Let those funny chaps make the pile, and let *us* spend it, eh? I could show them how that's done, I fancy! By-the-by, Lauristina, I hope it won't inconvenience you if I'm a trifle in arrears with your allowance? I am sure I don't know how it is, for I live like a hermit, but a great deal seems to have been flowing out, and precious little flowing in lately."

Miss Dupins made an immense effort.

"But, my dear father, could you not find out how

it is?" said she. "Could not I help you to find out? I really am supposed to be good at sums. It's my strong point, you know! I believe I might disentangle your affairs for you, if you would only allow me to try. You say you live simply—then someone surely must be cheating you? After all, money does not flow in and flow out, like a tide, without any human agency. It isn't on my own account that I am worrying you (though, indeed, I had rather counted on this quarter's allowance when I took this little house), but on yours. Dear father, I am afraid I seem very tiresome, but——"

"Is not that picture hanging crookedly?" he interrupted suddenly. "I must put it straight before I go! It spoils the effect of your otherwise charming room. It is just beyond your reach, my dear! though you are quite tall enough for a woman—quite! They run too big nowadays, I consider. I always think that you are of a very graceful height, Lauristina. Indeed, you are quite a graceful creature, though a little annoying sometimes!"

He got up and walked stiffly across the room, patting her shoulder as he passed her. He felt that she certainly had been annoying that evening, but that he forgave her because she was a woman—and graceful. When her brother had caused annoyance he had not been forgiven, he being a man, and decidedly ungraceful!

Miss Dupins bit her lip, and knew not whether it trembled with laughter or with vexation. She had cut his visit short! He wouldn't stay after that venture on her part; he seldom spoke to her with any ill-temper, for he had a great sense of dignity, and ill-temper is undignified—but he would not suffer her interference.

"I must be off again, on Shanks, his mare! The only mare I can afford nowadays," said he cheerfully, when he had put the picture straight. Then he kissed her forehead and patted her shoulder again. "And what was the funny fellow doing here?—that is, if you do not mind my asking you, my dear," he said.

"Oh, of course I don't mind! I should never mind how many questions you asked me, father," said Miss Dupins rather wistfully. "Mr. Cole has become quite a friend of mine—he often comes to see me." She laughed softly at the recollection. "I must tell you that I acted as his interpreter at Compiègne," she explained. "He was always trying to say the funniest things in the most abominable French! I had to go to the rescue of his racy stories. I scarcely expected to meet him again, but it appears he remembered my lessons (he is a person with a long memory for a good turn), and he arrived here one day with a request that I would take him on once more—but not for French conversation this time. He is quite aware of his own deficiencies, and he had a rather exalted idea of the merits and charms of society. He wants to take a hand in the social game—not, I think, from any vulgar desire to appear above the station he was born in, but rather from a keen relish for the experiences of life. He considered himself to be in need of some preliminary polishing, which he suggested I might effect! He softened my heart by telling me that he knew that I was a 'born teacher,' and so I am! I am lonely without pupils! The idea seemed absurd on the face of it, but eventually I agreed. Indeed, to tell you the whole truth, I am even now planning a small dinner for his benefit. Would you do me the honour of coming to it?"

A rather shrewd expression crossed the old gentleman's face.

"Why now, why not?" said he. "I should certainly continue the polishing process if I were you, Lauristina! The funny fellow knows a gentlewoman when he meets her, anyhow! But do be careful not to be too heavy-handed. Rub lightly, you know. That's all my advice, if you care to have it. If you'll forgive my saying so, my dear, you might be inclined possibly to bear down too heavily, eh? Funny fellows are often apt to think no small beer of themselves. They need a light touch. Rub *very* lightly, my love!"

The soirée at — House came to Miss Dupins as a happy solution of difficulties. She knew several members of the committee (Sir Hubert among others) : she could easily get invitations for her friends, and she could carry her little party off there after dinner. She had had thoughts of taking stalls at a theatre, but this would be far better, far more in her own line, and the Redstones were the very people to ask to meet Mr. Cole. Sir Hubert and his daughter Julie were both cosmopolitan, and easy to get on with. They were cultivated and amusing. She wrote also to Mrs. Graham, whom she did not know so well, but whom she thought her elderly protégé must certainly admire for her liveliness and dainty prettiness.

Miss Dupins had presided over many large college entertainments, but she felt absurdly shy over this small venture in her own little house. The informal alarmed her more than the formal, and she knew that she should miss the protection of the panoply of an official position. She was slightly vexed when Sir Hubert asked leave to bring his granddaughter in place of his daughter. She was attracted by Babette, but felt that Babette's aunt would have been better suited to the occasion. A little gay, emotional thing, in her early youth, would surely find this but a dull set-out, and there was no time to search for young companionship for her.

When the evening came Mr. Cole was the first arrival, and he made his appearance a second or two before the hour at which he had been asked.

"I'm the first, I see," he said, glancing round as he entered the drawing-room. "Am I too early? I determined I would not keep you waiting, anyway. Is it etiquette to be a few minutes late? I've an idea that I've heard so, but I wouldn't act on it, for it doesn't seem to me to be good manners to keep a lady waiting for her dinner. Tyler would have known."

"You are not at all too early. I am glad you have come first. This is a very small and informal dinner,



you know. I want you to take Mrs. Graham down and to sit on my left. You'll remember that?"

He smiled.

"Why, you are feeling a bit nervous!" he said. "That's funny, isn't it? I'm not, and you might think I'd some cause, seeing I'm of rather a different kind to the rest, but to me a game is but a game, after all! It don't matter enough to get jumpy over when all's said and done; though I'm sure it's a pretty game too," he added politely.

He looked about him with frank appreciation. The flowers he had sent (he no longer invested in tight bouquets) gave the room an air of unusual festivity.

"I'm fond of flowers myself," he observed. "Their manners can be depended on, eh? They always give a kind welcome and behave themselves to admiration."

Mrs. Graham was announced at that moment, and Mr. Cole, being properly introduced to her, regarded her with keen attention. He thought her very smart, but when it transpired that she had a grown-up son he was shocked. If she had been a plain, hard-working woman she'd have been nearly worn out by now, her hair wouldn't shine like that, and she'd have lost her teeth and her figure. That was what he thought as he met her sparkling smile and touched her white small hand!

It was true that the plain, hard-working woman had never had any attraction for him, but yet he was moved by a strong wave of class jealousy, and felt suddenly contemptuously resentful of the protracted youthfulness that seemed to him almost indecent.

"I asked Sir Hubert and Miss Redstone to meet you," Miss Dupins was saying to Mrs. Graham. "But Julie was engaged, and you know how the dear man loves to take that little girl about with him! He asked me if he might bring Babette in place of her aunt, and so she is coming instead."

Neither lady was looking at Mr. Cole, and if they had done so his face would have revealed nothing, but he was certainly considerably startled.

"Sir Hubert and Miss Redstone and Babette! Lord! We're in for it!" he exclaimed to himself. "But there, she'll never know me. I'm *not* the drinking chap she knew, thank Tyler! Well, well! Pull yourself together, Jethro, for here they are."

He moved back into the shadow and watched Babette enter the room. What a slight creature! Not a beautiful woman like Barbara when he first saw *her*. No indeed! not to be compared with poor, unlucky Barbara! The undeveloped, girlish figure, the small pale face (Babette was very pale that evening), the slender arms and fine mouse-coloured hair, did not strike Jethro as beautiful. Sir Hubert was a fine old chap; he admired the old musician's leonine head and piercing eyes and gallant bearing. Doubtless he was very indulgent to that little pretender. Jethro noticed that she wore jewels, and he wondered, for his own part, what the old man saw in her.

Mr. Dupins was the last to come. He was always late for everything, and always full of urbane apologies. Mr. Cole was amused at the old gentleman's ceremonious manner to his daughter.

Then dinner was announced, and he had to give his arm to Mrs. Graham, and they all went downstairs.

The tiny oak panelled dining-room was lit with candles, and the table was decorated with ivy and branches of fir-cones and silver pennies of honesty. Mr. Cole thought it odd to have such country stuff on a dinner table. Nothing escaped his notice; the whole entertainment interested him vastly, though an almost too pungent flavour was added to the feast by the fact of Babette's sitting opposite to him.

The talk at the dinner was very animated; the hostess wondered if it were all that her pupil had hoped for! She had at least been fortunate in securing three guests of marked social talent, for Sir Hubert's genial courtesy was always helpful to his hostess. Mr. Cole brought the savour of intense individuality and genuine interest to the feast, and Babette was like her father in

that respect; she might be tragic, petulant, or moody at times, her tongue might wag too fast, her spirits fly up and down like quicksilver, but she never knew what it was to be bored, and the man who sat next her, whether he were old or whether he were young, was also safeguarded against that creeping paralysis.

Colonel Dupins found her charming! She would have preferred a younger man, but since youth was not forthcoming, the old beau's courtliness pleased her well enough. She chattered away gaily, and Jethro Cole caught scraps of her conversation now and again as they floated across the table. He listened with the grimmest amusement. To think that this was his brat and poor Barbara's!

"No, I don't go in for anything very seriously," Babette was saying; "granddad insists on my studying harmony, but though I love music I don't like the *grammar* of it! It's the same with languages. I can talk enough to make myself understood in Italian and French and German, because I've knocked about in little foreign pensions and inns where the English don't go, but I never had time to read and study a great deal in those days. After all, it is nice to have leisure to do the things one likes doing!"

Mr. Cole agreed with her there.

"Oh, thank you! I'm so glad you think so, even if it isn't true."

This was evidently in reply to a compliment, but Colonel Dupins' voice did not carry like Babette's.

"Oh *no*, no! It's perfectly horrid in every way to be poor! It isn't a bit 'blessed.' I know, because I've tried. Poverty is very bad for one's character! It makes one so wicked."

This last remark happened to be delivered at a moment when there was a lull in the general conversation. Everyone heard it, and laughed. Mr. Cole came to Babette's support from the other side of the table.

"Yes, that is so!" said he. "Poverty is horrid! What's more, it's meant to be horrid, just as work-

houses and prisons are meant to be horrid, and for why? that people may be spurred to get out of it! If poverty weren't horrid, we might all settle down contentedly in quiet backwaters and puddles and grow fat, I suppose."

"I do not know that we need suppose that, though," said Sir Hubert. "Self-interest is not the only, or even the chief, incentive to action! God forbid!"

"That was what I was thinking," said Miss Dupins, smiling gratefully at him; "it would hardly be worth while to be alive if we all lived only for self-interest. Such cramped, short views would make life flat and dull indeed—a story with no point, a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

"Ah—that's good! that's very well put," said Mr. Cole quickly.

Miss Dupins laughed, and looked at him with friendly eyes. She must remember to tell him that the phrase was Shakespeare's; but how ready he was to appreciate a fine sentence, even though he did not know when it was in quotation marks!

Babette had not yet clearly seen Mr. Cole, for the decorations on the table hid his face from her. She leant to one side a little now, and peeped round them.

"I am glad you, too, think that poverty is horrid," said she, and then the smile on her lips died, and her face blanched.

She had forgotten what he was like, or, rather, the remembrance of him had been overlaid or thrust down. For a time she had believed him to be dead, quite lately a horrible suspicion had come to her that he was alive! Now, as her eyes met his, the essential personality of the man glanced out at her from under the grizzled eyebrows, and in a flash she knew him. He was respectable, prosperous, assured, instead of at odds with the world, defiant, and more or less tipsy; but she had no doubt whatever of his identity. It struck her consciousness like a blow. For a second the twinkling candles and the faces round her swam in a wild whirl; then she caught at her self-control and recovered it.

No one, excepting Jethro Cole, saw that she had been momentarily shaken, and for his part he admired the way in which she turned her attention to the old gentleman at her side, not allowing her glance to stray again after that first horrified stare of recognition.

That thrill of horror had no baleful effect on the party! Jethro seconded his daughter, and they both played up well. She had spunk, at any rate; she had some spunk, he said to himself.

Miss Dupins was quite satisfied with the success of her entertainment. Conversation never flagged. Her pupil acquitted himself remarkably well; she could see that Sir Hubert really liked him!

They all adjourned very gaily in a taxi to — House after dinner. Babette had many and grievous failings, but at least she never showed the white feather at a crisis!

## CHAPTER XVI

"We fall on guard, and after all it is only a friend who comes to meet us."—LOUIS STEVENSON.

THE "At Home" at — House was one of the gayest and smartest functions of the winter season. It was held on the evening of the opening day, and the rooms had been decorated for royalty. Had nothing happened to startle her, had there been no sudden emergence of a skeleton at the feast, Babette would have greatly enjoyed the scene, for no one loved lights, laughter, and colour more than she did; even as it was, the sound of the music, the sight of flowers and jewels and gay dresses, gave her courage a flip, and her greenish eyes shone very brightly between their dark lashes, and the colour came back to her cheeks as she mounted the broad, scarlet-carpeted stairs side by side with her father.

"A fine set out! What loot there would be here!" Jethro Cole said, when they reached the landing.

The band was playing, and the Hungarian uniform struck a rich note of blue and gold. The pictures on the walls, the exquisite tapestry and armour, were almost put out of countenance by the masses of hot-house blooms, by the flags, and the pretty women. The man at Babette's side glanced at her, and then lowered his voice.

"I see you know me. We had better have it out, eh?" he said.

"Yes, that we must," she replied. Her heart beat fast, but she followed his lead; and they presently wandered away from the others on the ostensible plea of looking at the collection of snuff-boxes. Babette

took a wicker chair under a huge palm. Her knees shook, and she clasped her fingers tightly on her lap.

"You went white when you recognized me, but you have no need to be afraid. I don't mean to make trouble for you," Jethro Cole said gruffly.

"I suppose you really are my father," the girl said in a low voice.

He nodded. "Yes. There's no doubt of that. I wouldn't have come if I'd known Miss Dupins knew the Redstones, and that there was one chance in a hundred of our meeting! Even when you came into the room I thought it was pretty safe. Cole is a common name, and I'm very much altered, and you were a small kid when I saw you last—I fancied you wouldn't recollect me."

"I do remember—a little," Babette said unwillingly.

"Not a pleasant memory! You don't want to have any truck with me, eh?"

"No, oh no! of course I do not want to."

"Well, you needn't! That's what I'm telling you. They pet you and make a lot of you, no doubt. I don't suppose you feel that you would gain much by coming to me."

"*Gain!*" said Babette, with such passionate though subdued emphasis that he laughed grimly.

"But you've no call to hate or despise me either. I suppose you think I played it pretty low down? It must have seemed so; but I wasn't so bad as you think. I've kept an eye on you all along. I went twice to see after you. The first time I found your mother had married Mr. Rothenstein."

"I can't understand," said Babette. "Did my mother know?"

"Good Lord, no!" He frowned at the idea. "Don't make any mistake about that. She was an honest woman, your mother was. Of course she didn't know!"

"Then you just went away again without telling her you were alive?"

He nodded. It was an embarrassing sort of story to tell a daughter.

"I—I believe I think that that was rather nice of you," said she.

The comment was unexpected; and Jethro Cole laughed. Then he remembered Miss Dupins' dictum, "But that was a sin."

"I suspect that your principles are not so high class as your surroundings, my girl," said he. "But it certainly seemed to me the only decent thing to do! All the same, if that other chap hadn't been behaving well to you, if he had bullied or starved or ill-treated you, I should have stepped in. I didn't hanker after having a kid on my hands, but in that case I would have stepped in."

Babette's eyes brightened with anger.

"Oh, mammy's man never bullied or starved or ill-treated me. It is only real fathers who do that kind of thing," she said.

She was always furiously indignant at the slightest aspersion on her stepfather, but Jethro Cole had not maligned him! She could not have explained why the mere suggestion that he might have acted otherwise had made her angry. Perhaps it was not that suggestion, but a far deeper resentment, that stirred her. In proportion to her gratitude to her stepfather had been her contemptuous dislike for the very memory of her real father; yet now that baleful, shadowy bogey was dispersing like a noxious vapour in daylight, and this flesh-and-blood parent roused in her unwilling soul both sympathy and antagonism.

"Ah, you've inherited my quick temper," said he. "Or perhaps your mother's—for Barbara had a temper, too!"

Babette cooled again.

"I am not like mammy, for she was good," she said gravely. "When did you come the second time?"

"I went to Madame Berne's boarding-house on the day on which you left it. I meant to claim you then,



but you had taken the matter into your own hands. You had provided yourself with a fine grandfather and a couple of aunts! There was no need for me!"

"Then if I had waited I should not have starved," Babette said with slow wonder.

Her mind reverted to that time in France when events had crowded so fast on each other's heels that before she was accustomed to one strange fact another confronted her: to the awful night when mammy's man had died; to the chill morn when there scarcely seemed time to mourn him; when the grim face of sheer destitution had stared at her over the shoulder of her natural grief, and her tears for the man who had been the only protector of her childhood were frozen by the terror of being turned out to starve! How quickly on that had love and luxury forced themselves in at her door, claiming her eagerly, and refusing to be denied! Yet even then she had not seen all that the fates were sending her way.

Babette looked at her real father standing before her now. She looked at the humorous red-brown eyes, at the square-set, virile figure, at the wiry, curly, grizzled hair and low broad forehead. This was no contemptible skulker. No! If she had waited for him she need certainly not have starved.

"But I am glad I didn't wait!" she cried, with a revulsion of defiant and passionate loyalty to her dead. "I am still glad! I am the daughter of mammy's man. I am not yours. *He* brought me up and paid for me. He was kind to me, and taught me all I know. You can't desert a child when she's little, and then one fine day when she is grown up change your mind and say, 'Now you can come and be my girl.' She isn't yours any longer if you've taken no trouble to make her yours during all the years she's been growing. You can't do it!"

Her voice broke on a high note. Jethro Cole was reminded of a moment when he had caught a young bird in his hand, and it had pecked at his fingers with

its yellowish, gristly beak, that was not yet quite hard, and had chirped shrilly. He had not had any intention of hurting the bird, and he did not want to hurt Babette.

"That is a bit what I felt myself," he said calmly. "It wouldn't have been fair to spoil your game—considering all things! I told myself so then, and as things are now, why, I've no intention whatever of upsetting your apple-cart. You may go your own way for me."

He opened his hands wide with a gesture of himself letting something go. They were short-fingered hands, broad, but rather small for his size, and very dexterous. Babette's hands were like her father's in shape, but dimpled and soft.

The defiance died out of her face.

"I—I make mistakes," she said. "I had a wrong idea. I thought you different. I don't remember you very clearly, and I always tried to forget."

Jethro Cole winced. He had not known that his feelings could be so hurt by his daughter; but he did not like to be told that she had always tried to forget him.

"Quite so! quite so!" he said. "I was a precious bad lot—but I am not what I was."

He fetched a chair that someone had just vacated and sat down by her side. The frou-frou of dresses, the murmur of voices, filled up the interlude of their conversation.

"Look at that elderly man making up to a girl young enough to be his daughter," someone had said as they passed by.

Mr. Cole caught the comment and grinned. He *was* trying to make friends with his daughter, and he meant to succeed. It was insufferable that she should despise him.

"I don't know what you are," said Babette wearily, "but I can see that you are not the kind who would write letters to try to get money out of me, or who would threaten me if I did not send it."

Jethro whistled. "Who has been doing that? You

don't know? Well, then, did you jump to the conclusion that it might be *me*?"

She nodded assent. Mr. Cole was silent for fully half a minute. Then: "When I was at my worst, I'd sooner have been hanged than play such a scurvy trick as that," he remarked. "You've got to believe that, whatever else you mistake. Now, say, 'I believe that, father.'"

Babette looked straight into his eyes.

"Yes. I believe that now," she said, but the "father" stuck in her throat.

He laughed shortly.

"And what about that skunk? It seems to me I had better tackle him."

"Oh!" cried Babette.

She clasped her hands together softly, and her cheeks dimpled with a smile. So here was another way out. Not, to be sure, the way Siegfried had recommended, but another way that entailed neither humiliation nor a painful confession.

"Why then, do! please do!" she cried.

Jethro regarded her attentively. When she smiled she seemed to be again that little girl-child whom he had once petted when he was sober, but who had become shy of him because he was uncertain in his behaviour when drunk. He wondered if she remembered that the last time he had spoken to her had been in Mary Anne Tavey's room.

"I am very lucky to-day," Babette said, with an accent of wonder in her voice. "Twice this day I have believed that a dreadful misfortune was coming near, and twice when it got quite close it turned from an enemy into a friend. That is extraordinary."

"She is an odd little creature," Jethro thought; "elfish still, and changeable of mood."

"Look here, Barbara," said he. "I owe you something, because though you don't care to be reminded of it, you wouldn't be in this world if it hadn't been for me, and no one (stepfather or otherwise) can do away

with that, anyhow. Of course, I own I didn't bring you up, and that's why I shan't ever make any claims on you; but you are my flesh and blood all the same. You may count on me, and I should like you to tell me who has been threatening you, and what it is all about. It's safe to tell me. I don't blab. I don't drink now. If I did, I shouldn't be in the position I am in. What's gone wrong with your game, eh? I'm not a friend to be despised. You can safely trust me, and I hope you will."

The girl drew a long breath.

"Why, I *do*," she said, and pleased he undoubtedly was.

And then she told him.

"They are all kind to me. I should be very happy if everything were not spoilt because a dreadful threatening someone writes horrible letters to me. It began soon after I got to London. First of all I thought it might possibly be Mary Anne Tavey. You see, it was so long since I had seen her that I had forgotten what she was like, but directly I was face to face with her I knew she could never have done such a thing; and then I was much more terrified, because when I was sure it was not her, a kind of horror came over me. I—I thought—oh, I beg your pardon for thinking that! Now that I see you, I know how wrong I was, and the worst of the terror is gone."

"H'm. How much did you send the blackguard who you fancied was me?"

"The first time I sent all I had. It was about five pounds. Then I sent more later. I felt I could not bear to have him walk in and tell granddad. Granddad would be so—so awfully shocked, and sorry, too. You see, he is fond of me. It never seemed enough, but at last the creature wrote that if I were to send one good large lump sum instead of dribblets, that would be of some use, and he would make another start in another country with it, and he need never trouble me any more. Granddad gives me pocket-money, but that

was not enough, and I could not ask him for more. He would have given it at once. He is so generous, but I couldn't. So I pawned my ornaments then. I thought perhaps that really might be the end of it. I raised five pounds on these"—touching her opals—"and there were others besides. I sent the whole sum, and wrote, 'This must be the very last I ever hear of you;' he had promised it should be. It wasn't, though. I've had other letters since."

"So I should suppose," said Jethro Cole grimly.

"And the dreadful part of it all is that Aunt Harriet—Mrs. Durnham, I mean—suspects something. She asked me what I had done with my opals. Granddad is slow to think evil of me, but even he would have wondered and questioned if I had come down without them to-night. I was in despair."

Jethro glanced at her neck.

"How did you manage to redeem them?"

"I didn't. That was the other extraordinarily lucky thing that happened to-day. My cousin Siegfried brought them back and gave them to me—just in time."

Jethro grunted.

"Gave 'em back, eh? Then there's another who knows something. Your secret is not very safe, my girl!"

"Siegfried does not know, and he wouldn't pry," said Babette. "He is kind and honourable, like his grandfather."

"You've grown very fond of that family, but it is not yours, after all," said he, with a curious unexpected twinge of jealousy.

"Oh, I know that," cried she bitterly. "I don't really belong to what is kind and honourable and good, but sometimes I pretend that I do, even to myself. If one didn't pretend to one's self one couldn't go on!"

He looked at her thoughtfully.

"There is no use in bitterness," said he. "I was bitter before I met Tyler. It only wastes steam. Well, I fancy I can settle that blackguard for you.

You've never seen the gentleman, I take it? Have you answered his last letter?"

She shook her head.

"No; it only came yesterday."

"Spoilt the party for you, eh?" said he. Somehow his fingers itched to have their grip on the fellow's throat. "Don't send any more money, but write a soothing answer. Appoint a safe place where you can meet."

"If I don't send the money he'll come to see Sir Hubert at once. I can't have him do that!" she cried quickly.

"Not he!" said Jethro contemptuously. "Lord! you are really very green, Barbara, in spite of your deceiving ways. Do what I tell you. Write word that you'll meet our blackmailing friend at . . . well, how about the gardener's cottage in Kensington Gardens? I'll go with you. You can just make sure of him, and then turn him over to me. He won't trouble you any more after I've done with him."

"And then I shall be free," said Babette.

But she spoke without elation. A wave of depression swept over her, and she shivered.

"What are you thinking about now? Anything else wrong?" Mr. Cole asked sharply. "Come; out with it if there is. You had better tell me, you know."

"I was thinking that when mammy's man died I was very sorry for him," Babette said. "It seemed most dreadful he should be shut away from the sunshine and the green trees and the roads we walked along, but that now I sometimes wish that I were dead, too."

"Stuff! Stuff!" Jethro Cole cried angrily. "You've no business to wish anything of the sort. You've got your life in front of you! I only wish that I had as many years in front of *me*, or that you were a boy, and could go on where I leave off! There'd be more fun in the game then! I don't like the full stop of the grave. I don't like it at all."

He frowned. Compunction, which, no doubt, he should have experienced before, was coming in like a flood now. This green-eyed slip of a girl was indubitably akin to him. Instinctively he understood her moods.

"I'll own you to-night if you like, Barbara!" cried he. "And then you can snap your fingers at the coil! I'm going to be rich, too—rich enough to buy up your fine grandfather and your grand aunts twice over!"

"Oh, do you think that would tempt me?" cried Babette, and the next minute laughed at her own indignation. "But of course you do! For what else did tempt me? I am silly to-night, and I am being rude and ungrateful, too," she added, with a quick change of tone. "Yes, but I do thank you for coming to my help! And I will do just as you advise about writing to the creature." She hesitated, and then added shyly, "And I shall never, never think of you again in the same way as I did before."

"You hadn't much chance of thinking well of me," Jethro Cole owned. "But there's no use in going back on what is past. Yesterday is dead, and we are alive to-day. Look, there's Miss Dupins and your grandfather coming this way. . . . They would be pretty well surprised if they knew what we'd been saying to each other, wouldn't they?"

Babette sighed.

"On the day they know they'll despise and hate me," she said sadly.

"And that's why you wish you were dead," said he.

"Well, well, it doesn't do to be a villain with a heart! That's where it is, my girl. But it was my fault from the beginning, and I'm sorry for it."

He got up as he spoke, and went to meet Miss Dupins. "Miss Barbara and I have been making friends," he said.

"Miss Redstone is a charming girl," said Miss Dupins gently.

Babette had waited for Sir Hubert, and was now chattering brightly to him.

"Oh, ah! I shouldn't have called her Barbara. Too familiar, eh? What else have I done wrong this evening?"

"The little thing is barely grown up, so it does not so much matter. She is certainly young enough to be your daughter," the schoolmistress said indulgently.

She wondered why Mr. Cole laughed explosively.

"Why, so she is—so she is!" he said; "and a pretty handful of a daughter she would be, too!"



## CHAPTER XVII

JUST beyond the actual confines of London, but not beyond the reach of its fogs and smuts, the Tylerine factory raised its huge fabric against the sky. Human thought materializes in ugly form sometimes. God thinks, and behold there is grass and fruit, and sun and moon, and birds and beasts; man thinks, and there are chimneys and blackened country, and pits and scars on dear mother-earth, not to mention strange, abortive atrocities in the building line; and yet the creative instinct is from the original Creator, who, one humbly hopes, watches his funny, clumsy, little men with sympathy while they make their queer mud pies, knowing that one day they shall yet find out the way to build the city without flaw, the New Jerusalem of all the patriots and of all the saints.

Mr. Jethro Cole was not troubling his head about New Jerusalems; he was pleased with his Tylerine factory as it stood. Artisan buildings were springing up as fast as mushrooms all round it, and an indescribable odour (the odour of Tylerine in the making) pervaded the air. He sniffed it as he waited for his supper; his intense interest in Tylerine made him relish even the smell of it.

He lived in the square red-brick house adjoining the factory, and had a charwoman in to "do" for him, though he was aware that he was "done" in more senses than one. The mutton-chop which Mrs. Higgins presently brought up was burnt outside and raw inside, and the potatoes that accompanied it were sodden and leathery. Jethro swore at the food, and incidentally

at Mrs. Higgins. He had been hungry, but he pushed away the plate in disgust, and satisfied his healthy appetite with hunks of bread and cheese. He did not mind plain fare, but, like Babette, he was fastidious, and would rather go underfed than touch what was dirty, untidy, or badly served.

Mrs. Higgins was a slight, delicate woman of the plaintively superior type. She secretly considered her employer "low" in his ways. She had been housemaid in a grand house before her marriage, but she was certainly no cook. When Mr. Cole swore at her, she choked down tears of anger. When he told her quite truly that he could have broiled that chop a great deal better for himself, if only he had had the time that she had wasted over spoiling it, she contemptuously believed him. She thought that his handiness was one of the many signs that he was no gentleman, for to Mrs. Higgins helplessness was the hall-mark of the born aristocrat. Yet, though she despised him, she had quickly found out that, despite occasional bad language, he was soft-hearted, and apt to be sorry for women. He had been told all about the bad husband who had "drunk up" her earnings before he drank himself into a grave.

"We *are* brutes!" he had owned gloomily on hearing her tale of woe, and he illogically put up with her incompetent service, because Mr. Higgins had been a "poor lot." He never put up with incompetent service where a man was concerned; there he knew better.

This evening he got rid of her as soon as she had put down an ill-smelling lamp that oozed oil. He would clean and trim it himself presently; in the meanwhile he wanted to read the letter that had come up on the tray with the mutton-chop. He received hundreds of business communications every week, but very few letters of a private nature. He was sure this square creamy envelope was from Babette. The very writing was unbusiness-like, with its flying dots and quick thick dashes. It was the first letter he had ever

received from his daughter; he wondered if it would also be the last. She had not shown much desire to cultivate his further acquaintance, though he had no doubt that the poor little fool would be glad he should rid her of the fellow who was blackmailing her, and he would do that with a will.

The letter was short.

"I enclose the creature's note," Babette wrote, "and I will act as you advise." That was all. She avoided addressing him as father, or signing herself as daughter. Perhaps, under the circumstances, that was wise, yet he knew that it was distaste, not caution, that prevented her.

"She hates to realize that I am her father. Yet if I were to set myself to try, I believe I could make that little thing fond of me," he reflected. Then he read the enclosure. It was written on a dirty scrap of thin paper:

"DEAR MADAM,

"I will mete you at the seat on the north side of the gardener's cottage in Kensington Gardens at 4 o'clock on Tuesday next. You must be alone, and please bring the money with you, and carry in your hand the paper called *Choise Morsels*, with the name plainly showing. I will carry the same, so as you will see that I am

"THE ONE WHO KNOWS."

"And you'll know a bit more before you're a week older," Mr. Cole said to himself with a grin smile.

He did not waste time in vain speculations as to the identity of this dirty blackmailer. Like Babette herself, he took it for granted that someone who had known her as a child had recognized her under her new style and title. That mean sort could easily be choked off; the coming interview did not trouble Mr. Cole in the least (indeed, he was rather looking forward to it), but yet he frowned as he consigned Babette's note to the flames. Since the night of the party he had thought a

good deal about that slip of a girl who was his child and poor Barbara's. He would have scoffed at the idea that a belated parental affection was waking in him, yet he felt he would have liked to have tried conclusions with the fellow who had won the hearts of both his wife and his child.

"I am the daughter of mammy's man. I am not yours," she had cried. Yet she *was* his—his by token of her very faults.

A faint stirring of retrospective jealousy had moved him when she had flung down that impulsive defiance. It moved him again now, but alas! one cannot compete with the dead. They have the advantage. What influence they possess is unassailable, and they can make no false steps, nor blindly blunder any more.

"He taught me all I know," she had cried.

"Yet I could teach a few things, too, now. When I come to turn over what's in me, I've picked up some knowledgeable hints," Mr. Cole said thoughtfully to himself, and forthwith fell into a rather curious consideration as to what parts of his own experience of life could be usefully passed on to the next generation.

He had learnt to control the brute in himself; he could certainly give a few useful hints to poor wretches who were trying to free themselves from the slavery of drink. Then he had his own store of axioms, rules he had learnt to respect by breaking his head against them, and he knew something about the best way to manage other people.

"Never set people's backs up unless you're really prepared to fight 'em." That was one rule. He had wasted too much energy in his youth in senseless quarrels that did no good, and led to nothing in the end.

"Don't go against anyone's self-respect. Remember that most chaps, and all women, will sooner starve than take a lower place than what they think they're entitled to. *You* may think 'em senseless, but if you want to get good work out of 'em, you must take people

as they are, and not as you would have made 'em if you'd been the Almighty." That was another of the facts he had learnt to apprehend. Obvious enough, no doubt; but those truths that a man has discovered for himself always bear the stamp of originality to him, and until lately Jethro had been no great reader. His facts were all found at "first hand."

It was dull that there was no one to profit by his gleanings. He would have given much to see the sharp, red-haired countenance and lean figure of Tyler sitting opposite to him once more, to hear Tyler telling him what sort of a fool he was. The doctor's had been a combative nature, the salient expression of his keen, light eyes had been combative, and he had had a scathing tongue. If you were not strong enough to hold your own with Tyler he became unendurably domineering and morally bullying, yet Jethro Cole missed him badly. He missed their differences of opinion, the rub and clash of mind against mind, and the immense interest in chemistry that they had had in common. Tyler had been a fighter to the end. He had fought Death gallantly, knowing, as only a doctor can know, each fraction of an inch that the enemy gained. He had been game up to the last breath, and it had been during those final, awful weeks, so packed with pain and with stoical endurance, that another bit of Jethro Cole's soul had awakened to consciousness. The curtain had been lifted then from that place where tenderness and loyalty and the capacity for sacrifice dwell, that holy of holies before which wholesome instinct makes us draw the veil.

Jethro Cole never let his thoughts rest on the memory of that time. He had done his level best—but, thank Heaven, it was over. He would have liked to have had Tyler back as he was in health, not as he was in sickness. Yet it had been during painful night watches, and during days of struggle, that Jethro's heart had asserted itself. It played a part in the constant nursing of an eccentric invalid; the exercise, no doubt, rendered

it the more vigorous ; and what is very much alive needs food, and clamours for it.

"Keep clear of women in any capacity, and of drink," had been Dr. Tyler's last injunction, and yet unwittingly in his weakness and pain he was preparing the way for Jethro's daughter.

"It's odd, but I believe I've got into a habit of having something to look after," Jethro said to himself. "I believe I want it. My girl wished she were dead ; that's because she has got into such a hole, and because she's young. I've wished that, too, in my youth ; and yet here I am now, at over fifty, with plenty of kick in me, and I should be sorry to die now—very sorry indeed. I must tell her that ; it may encourage her. Girls must need encouragement, poor things, especially when they take after the wrong parent, and ain't naturally so good as they should be."

So it was in a lenient and sympathetic frame of mind that Mr. Cole set out to meet Babette at Barker's in Kensington High Street. It touched his easily roused sense of fun that he should have made an assignation with his own daughter. They had agreed that he should wait for her in the refreshment-room. He ordered coffee for two, deciding that it would "hearten her up a bit," and he kept his eyes on the door till she opened it, glanced swiftly round, and came straight towards him. He noticed that, though she was simply dressed, she had an air of distinction.

"She might be a duchess by the way she holds up her head and walks across the room," he thought, with amused approbation.

She refused the coffee.

"If you please, I should like to get it over as quickly as we can," she said. "It is very kind of you to help me, especially as I am afraid I was rather horrid to you when you first began to talk to me ; but I hate and dread the whole business very much, and if only it is all settled and done with to-day, I shall be more thankful than I can ever say."

There were dark patches under her eyes, but she was composed, and Jethro Cole liked her composure.

"Come along. I'm not sorry you put some confidence in me," said he. "If I never do anything more for you, I'll settle this job!"

They went together into High Street, and struck across the gardens. He laughed as he trudged by her side.

"Suppose we meet anyone you know? They'll think I'm the sort of gay old dog who beguiles young women, eh?"

"Oh, don't!" said Babette. "That makes it worse!"

Jethro surveyed her with good-humoured, half-contemptuous sympathy.

"It will be all right. We aren't likely to meet anyone, for it's a beastly afternoon. It was only my joke."

Presently he spoke again, rather tentatively. "That other chap, now—who you declare was more father to you than I ever was—I suppose he would turn in his grave if he knew who had stolen his name, and played all these tricks on his family, eh?"

"Oh no, he wouldn't; mammy's man wouldn't mind. If I had thought it would have vexed him I would never have done it," said she.

"What? Didn't he mind lies? and he a gentleman!"

Oddly enough, he was shocked. His own course where his daughter was concerned was certainly not marked by strict veracity, but he had always had quite another standard for gentlemen.

"He was not so particular as granddad and Siegfried are," Babette allowed unwillingly. Alas! How many lies had she told to duns on his behalf! And what a strange revelation the scrupulous honour of Sir Hubert had been to her. Yet when her father rejoined, with a note of satisfaction in his tone—

"Then I don't think much of *him*," her sore and heavy heart fired again with indignation, and she cried:

"Perhaps not. But he was good to us, and where would we have been—mammy and I—without him?"

Her father made no retort. "You miss him. I see

that. Well, well ; it's not pleasant to miss anyone," he said with a sigh.

It certainly was a depressing afternoon. The scanty measure of winter daylight was nearly exhausted, and a dun-coloured fog crept towards them from the Serpentine. Babette felt as if all kinds of evil creatures lurked between the dim forms of the trees, as they struck across the grass and neared the gardener's cottage.

"Have you remembered to bring *Choice Morsels* ?" asked Jethro.

She assented dispiritedly.

"Oh, yes! The horrid little vulgarity is in my muff."

Her voice expressed her sick loathing of the whole squalid affair.

"Bring it out now, and go on to the seat on the north side as if you had come out alone. I shall be close by. It's lucky for us that the fog is thickening so. Your gentleman won't have seen me. You needn't be afraid; I shall be within ear-shot. As soon as ever I've spotted the chap I'll come forward."

"I am not so much afraid as disgusted," said Babette. "But that's worse—for it is with myself, too!"

She went on quickly, and sat down on the seat, drew out the flimsy pinkish paper, and displayed it with a flourish. She felt exactly as if she were making use of some mean and low kind of incantation that would raise some unclean spirit! She shook the paper defiantly. There was a printed picture of a comic man with a long nose and abnormally thin legs and a billy-cock hat on the outside leaf. She could not bear the suspense any more.

"Come—whoever you are!" she cried aloud, but she was not, after all, in the least prepared for what came.

She had expected to encounter a man, and when a woman emerged from the other side of the cottage, she did not at first realize that this could be the creature she had evoked. The woman came close up to her and displayed a copy of *Choice Morsels*.

Babette stared at the woman, who for her part



peeped furtively and shamefacedly at the girl, and then again the strange thing happened. When what Babette had dreaded came quite near, when she actually touched it, it seemed to change into something else, and all her angry aversion melted into sheer wonder.

"Why, I know you! I've seen you before! Why, you are nothing to be afraid of; you are only Célestine, after all!" she cried.

"Si, Mademoiselle; I am only poor Célestine. Mademoiselle remembers me, *sans doute*. I was lent by Mrs. Graham. It was arranged I should travel with Miss Redstone. I was a good packer and traveller, was I not, Mademoiselle? I was with Miss Redstone at the house of Madame Berne where the poor gentleman, the step-papa of Mademoiselle, died."

Célestine spoke in quick, low tones. She was deprecating and ashamed, yet driven on by despair. Her eyes were hollow with hunger; the bones of her forehead and cheeks stood out horribly. Her trim smartness had disappeared. The thin angles of her shoulders showed through the threadbare shawl she had drawn round them. Her voice had the husky timbre of weakness.

"I haf kept Mademoiselle's secret up till now. I knew it all the while, but I told no one but only my 'usband. Now I will keep it still, for ever and for ever, if Mademoiselle will only gif to me this one more sum of money. I must 'ave more because——"

"Because you are of the tribe of the horse-leech," said Jethro Cole's voice behind them.

His hand was on Célestine's wrist. She started, and tried to flee, but was too late.

"Now you may as well go," he said to Babette. "I'll settle this job for you. You are a case for the police, not for young ladies, you know," he added to his prisoner.

The terror in Célestine's sharp, pinched face reminded Babette of the look in a trapped rabbit's eyes when the gamekeeper puts his hand on it. She could not bear to see it, for, with all her faults, she was pitiful.

"Don't be hard on her," she cried. "I—I think she is hungry."

"'Ungry? I *starve*, and my bébé, she *starve* too," Célestine cried fiercely. "And she"—pointing to Babette with her free hand—"she eat and drink all she can, and she wear fur and feather, and she lie soft, and she is no better than me. Mon Dieu, she is worse! She is only a cheat—she steal it all! No, no"—as her captor made a movement—"I do not know what I say. Do not let him take me to a prison, Mademoiselle. If he call the police, I tell everything—but yes, everything!" she cried shrilly.

"Hush, hush, Célestine. He is not going to call the police," said Babette.

Jethro shook his head at her.

"You shouldn't interfere, Barbara. You should run away home."

Then, turning to Célestine again, "Now you listen to me and keep quiet. This young lady here has been so silly as to send you money. I know that, for she has told me all about it, but she is never going to do it again. You may take my word for that. You are never going to get another farthing out of her. Have you understood that? Very well, then I'll tell you something else. You may come along with me now and tell your cock-and-bull story to Sir Hubert Redstone. He is not the kind who pays hush-money. He is a gentleman who has never had to hush up anything in his life, but you threatened you would go to him, and you shall. I'll take you to him myself. He'll not believe you. Why should he? But when you have told him your tale, I'll give you in charge for writing threatening letters, and then you'll have an opportunity for repeating it in the police-court. See? Come along."

He was surer and surer with every word that he spoke that the woman had no proofs whatever to bring forward. She had kept no letters; she had nothing to back her story. His silly little fool of a daughter had been "squeezed" for nothing. He knew Célestine

would not dare accompany him. He could feel, as he held her, that she was shaking with fear. The end was a foregone conclusion. Célestine's nerve gave way; she broke down, and begged only to be allowed to escape.

Babette stood looking from one to the other. She loathed the whole horrible situation, but she would not run away from it, as her father had bidden her run. A fellow-feeling for Célestine held her rooted to the spot. She must see the end. If necessary, she must intervene on Célestine's behalf; but it would not be necessary. Babette knew instinctively that Jethro Cole's bark was worse than his bite.

"What was it that put it into your head to write to me?" she asked. "I am sure Mr. Cole would let you go if you told him the whole truth."

"I tell you everything, and you make him let me go," gasped Célestine.

"Hurry up then and make a clean breast of it," said Jethro, "for the fog is thickening."

And then and there hurriedly, tremblingly, and in broken English, Célestine poured out her sad and rather shameful story. She told them how she had read Mary Anne's letter to Babette, but had never meant to do the little Mademoiselle any harm, and of how in an evil moment she had told the man who was now her husband of what she knew. "Jahnnie" had deserted and was now hiding from the police. He had been driven to desert by the wicked persecution of his officers, he said. They had nothing to live on excepting what she earned, and her earnings were more precarious than they used to be because she had worked too hard just before her baby was born, and was not as strong as she had been. She could support herself always, but the threefold burden was more than she could manage honestly. "When one cannot live honestly, one must be dishonest—but I do not *like* to be bad. To be good would be pleasant, if it were only not so hard," she said wistfully, and Babette's heart echoed the sentiment. Had she not also felt just that?

"I should not 'ave done it, but do nct shut me up. If I go to prison poor Jahnnie he starves, and they take my bébé to the 'ouse, and there I know she die before I come out. My bébé is different to common bébé's; she's sweeter; if no one loves 'er, she die. I know she die of the 'ouse," Célestine reiterated, but under her breath, for Jethro's will imposed itself on her and prevented her crying aloud.

Only one fact she kept back. It was "Jahnnie" who had written the letters to Babette, and had bullied her into going to meet the young lady, not quite daring to do that himself.

"I do not want that my bébé die by 'erself in the 'ouse and be buried and me not there," the wailing voice went on. "She would be afraid; she cry all the time when I leave her. I hear her cry now."

It seemed to Babette that the heavy yellow atmosphere was charged with stifling misery.

"Oh, let her go! She'll never write to me again. Let her go!" she cried.

"What did you go in for this sort of game for? You ain't the sort to make a success of it," said Jethro.

He eyed Célestine shrewdly, but not unkindly. "It's the man who is the skunk as usual. Don't I wish I had caught him? I'll give you a bit of advice now. Take your baby and cut loose from him. That's your best chance. If I let you off now, mind this, I won't be so soft if you let him make a cat's-paw of you again, and you won't have a silly young lady to deal with; you'll have me alone. You tell your man that, and that I'd be jolly well better pleased if I'd made his acquaintance."

"It was never Jahnnie. It was all me," said Célestine breathlessly.

"More shame to you! Well, don't try it on again, if you don't want to see the inside of a gaol, and be off," said Jethro.

He let go her wrist, and she went off, stumbling

heavily over the grass, drawing her scanty shawl about her shoulders and panting as she went.

"Oh, and she is starving—and I haven't a penny with me!" Babette cried, as the tragic figure disappeared into the fog.

"You won't be troubled any more. You are quit of that bother. You can cheer up now; you are quite safe," Jethro Cole said.

"You've been very kind, and I am grateful to you," said the girl, "but—but I think I shall never be cheerful any more."

## CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. DURNHAM was standing in the hall. Babette was confronted by her when she let herself in with her latch-key.

"Where have you been? What have you been about, Babette? You know that your grandfather would not allow you to run about alone in such a fog. Why do you do these strange things?" Mrs. Durnham asked gravely.

She never minced matters. Her speech was always direct and to the point, though slow. Siegfried sometimes reminded Babette of his mother, but with this difference—that he was her friend and Mrs. Durnham her enemy.

At that moment the girl felt that she had no fight left in her.

"Oh, Aunt Harriet, I've had such a miserable afternoon! Don't scold me, please. If you do I shall cry," said Babette.

She smiled as she spoke, but Mrs. Durnham regarded her attempt at conciliation with unqualified contempt.

"Your tears would be wasted on me. It is a pity to waste them," she said. "Were you alone?"

"Oh, of course I was! I did not mean to be out so long. I lost my way. The fog is very thick," Babette replied hurriedly.

"You were not alone," said Mrs. Durnham calmly. "That statement is not correct. I have no means of knowing whether the others are true or false. I heard you talking to some man on the doorstep just now. I looked through the window in the hall; he took leave of you as you opened the door."

"There! I felt someone was watching me!" cried Babette.

"Yes, I watched you," said Mrs. Durnham. "I have watched you for some time. This, of course, is only one of the many lies that poison the atmosphere of the house for honest people." Her slow, deliberate voice gave the effect of judgment rather than of passion. "Yet, I think that some day there will be an end; I believe that some day you will be found out."

Babette shivered; not with fear of being found out—that did not appear to her as a very likely contingency just now—but with an instinctive recoil from hatred.

So Mrs. Durnham felt that she poisoned the atmosphere of the house! Well, perhaps she did; perhaps that hard saying was true. Perhaps, to a really honourable soul, she might seem as horrible as the blackmailing bogey who lurked in darkness had seemed to her.

"I do not ask you who was with you, because it is waste of time to ask the truth of someone who replies with falsehood," the lady went on.

Then in the midst of her dismay Babette began to laugh.

"Who do you think he was? Why, Aunt Harriet, I believe you think it was someone young and interesting! Oh dear, oh dear! I just wish he had been! I think it would have been so nice and cheering to have just been having a little fun on this horrible and depressing day! I wasn't having any fun at all. Far, far from it!" she cried ruefully; for, indeed, the sparkle of life which she could so thoroughly have enjoyed was gone. She would so much have liked to have been careless and merry, to have got into small innocent scrapes like other girls, but one cannot be careless and merry when conscience has once begun to gnaw.

Mrs. Durnham regarded her with increased distaste. This levity was abhorrent to her.

"I will not bandy words with you," said she coldly. "Your Aunt Julie is keeping tea for you. You had

better go to explain your conduct to her. You can easily do that."

Babette made no reply. Now that she had no longer much fear of exposure, now that the bogey had turned into a wretched hunted creature of whom she had no terror, but for whom she had a painful fellow-feeling, she had the more leisure to be ashamed.

She went dejectedly upstairs and found Miss Redstone in a state of some annoyance. She had been alarmed at the girl being out in the thick fog, and in the reaction from alarm was now reflecting that the little niece on whom she had lavished endearments was certainly giving her sister Harriet cause for triumph. She was fond of Babette, but her faith was uncomfortably shaken by her sister's doubts. When Harriet misdoubted Julie's swans, that good lady always extolled their swanlike qualities the more warmly and extravagantly for a while; but, alas! she knew by experience that Harriet had a way of being in the right, and that knowledge influenced her in the long-run. Mrs. Durnham's was the stronger character of the two.

"Really, Babette, you are becoming too tiresome," said she, as the girl came slowly into the room. "Your Aunt Harriet has always told me that I spoil you, and I begin to see she has some reason for her remarks. You show no sort of consideration for me or for anyone else. It is very wrong of you to terrify us all in this way."

"I've been terrified myself!" said Babette, "but I am sorry that you were frightened, too, Aunt Julie."

"Your Aunt Harriett believes that you are a most deceitful girl, and how am I to defend you when you do these foolish things? Your Aunt Harriet——"

"Oh, dear Aunt Julie! do, for mercy's sake, leave off telling me what Aunt Harriet says! Do you suppose I don't know that she hates me?" cried Babette, dropping wearily into a chair by the tea-table. "Why, she has always loathed me from the minute I first walked into the house, and granddad kissed me and



called me 'Baby.' She knows every one of my faults by heart, and when I am hanged, she'll help the hangman. In the meantime, do please give me some tea!"

"That is not the way you should speak to me of your Aunt Harriet," said Miss Redstone, with some dignity; but then, as the light fell on Babette's white face, her mood changed. "Why, my child, how pinched and ill you look! What have you been about? What has happened to you?" she cried.

"I've been out in thick darkness, seeing sad, hungry ghosts. That is *quite* true, whatever Aunt Harriet may say," answered Babette.

Kindness always touched her, and inclined her to confidence, but the reply made Miss Redstone decidedly uncomfortable. There certainly was something mysterious about this niece. Miss Redstone enjoyed a mystery when it did not come too close to her. She liked to read about it in a novel, or to see it in the distance, in other people's lives, but she shrank from encountering it at close quarters. She did not relish it when it invaded her home and sat down to tea by her. She shirked asking for an explanation.

"I am sure you are overtired, dearest. That is why you say such strange things," said she.

Babette swallowed her tea in quick gulps. When Sir Hubert came into the room with Mrs. Durnham at his side she jumped up hastily. She felt she could bear no more.

"Stay, my dear! Why run away in such a hurry?" said Sir Hubert. His voice was kind, as it always was to this beloved child, but it was also troubled. "Your Aunt Harriet tells me you have been out all the afternoon in this dreadful fog. Where have you been? Why did you tell your aunt that you were alone if you were not alone? Or was there perhaps some mistake, some misunderstanding? I do not like to think that a granddaughter of mine tells lies," the old man said, with rather pathetic pride; for, alas! his son had told lies, and he never forgot it.

"I walked up High Street as far as Barker's, granddad," said Babette. "I didn't buy anything there! Then I went into Kensington Gardens, and while I was there the fog thickened and rolled up round me like a bank, so that I could hardly see my own hand. I should have been more frightened than I was if Mr. Cole had not kindly brought me home. You remember Mr. Cole, don't you? We met him when we dined with Miss Dupins. I think it was rather nice of him to see me safe to our own door-step; he says he is a most respectable old chap," Babette added, her dimples suddenly showing in a smile; "but it was very silly of me to tell Aunt Harriet that I had been all alone, when I was really quite well taken care of."

"Very silly, indeed," Sir Hubert said gravely; but he was relieved, too! "It is, after all, a perfectly simple matter, and I am greatly obliged to Mr. Cole for coming to the rescue. You must never be so foolish again, Baby. No wonder your Aunt Harriet was angry with you! Suppose you had been knocked down, crossing High Street in that fog? Suppose you had met some ill-conditioned loafer in the Park? It would have served *you* right, you good-for-nothing; but how about me? What should I do without you, eh?"

The pretended anger ill concealed so true a tenderness that Babette could not face it.

"I—I must go to my room. I've had a horrid afternoon, and I can't bear any more; I am deadly tired!" she cried, and so escaped from them all at last and ran upstairs, no one preventing her this time.

Instead, they looked at each other, doubt in one woman's face, triumph in the other's, and indignation in Sir Hubert's.

"Does Babette's behaviour look like innocence?" Mrs. Durnham asked slowly. "I am no adept at analyzing, I do not pretend to subtlety, but I cannot help asking myself and you—does such distress look like innocence?"

"Yes, it does! Of course it does!" said Sir Hubert

angrily. "And your prejudice does you no credit, Harriet. What reason have you for distrusting her?"

Mrs. Durnham shrugged her shoulders and shook her head, then seated herself calmly by her work-basket, and drew out her embroidery frame. She always liked to embroider when her mind was perturbed. The silken flowers that grew under her fingers had many passions worked into their petals. Her silence seemed charged with suggestion. Sir Hubert paced the room with quick steps. Just so had he walked up and down on that summer evening when he had been expecting the unknown grandchild, who had entered his heart on the day that she entered his house.

"Speak out! speak out!" he cried. "Surely, you know that it is always far meaner to hint than to speak. If you have anything to state you should state it; if not, you should hold your tongue; but you should never under any circumstances bring a vague accusation against anyone. That's the most devilishly unfair thing that anyone can do!"

Mrs. Durnham sorted her silks carefully. As she held the peacock-blue skeins against the light she could scarce see the colour for anger. Never had her father addressed her in that tone before; but her anger did not rest on his head, it only gathered in intensity against Babette. This, too, was her fault.

"I have not spoken because I do not think that there is very great use in crying to deaf ears," she said at last.

"What do you mean by that?" he cried, pausing in his walk. "Surely I am never unjust to my daughters. I do not stop my ears when you wish me to listen."

But he faltered and blenched under her steadily reproachful gaze.

"I own I don't like to hear the child blamed," he allowed. "And I often think that you are hard on Babette. I, especially, do not wish to be hard on her because—" he hesitated and then went on speaking with humility that was genuine and dignified—"because

for too many years I fostered undue hardness and resentment against her father. I have repented of that great sin, and I hope that God may forgive me, as I from my heart have forgiven my son."

"Dearest dear," cried Miss Redstone, the quick tears coming into her eyes, "you have always been the best of fathers. You have nothing for which you need blame yourself; as to Babette, I am very fond of the child! Yet I must allow that she is tiresome at times! Her temper has become uneven (I do not think she is quite so sweet as I thought her when we first met), and there can be no doubt that she is extravagant? She seems incapable of keeping a penny in her purse, and yet never knows how or where her money has gone! Yet it is absurd to talk as if she were a mass of deception. I should not be easily deceived."

Sir Hubert brushed her aside and challenged his daughter Harriet.

"If all that you have to bring forward against Babette is the charge of fitful tempers and childish petulances and extravagances, I do not want to be bothered with such complaints," said he. "Women of your years and of Julie's should be able to correct such girlish faults; but if at bottom there is something more serious, why then tell me so, Harriet, and give me the reasons for your belief, and I will try to listen with patience, for I have never known you err on the side of exaggeration; that is rather my failing and Julie's."

He sighed heavily. Babette's distress had disturbed him, though he would not allow that he was disturbed.

"I am afraid I spoke hastily to you. I try to be a just man, but I do not always succeed," said he.

Under other circumstances that admission would have softened Mrs. Durnham's heart, but jealousy had scorched it past softening.

"No, not always," she agreed, with the accents that aped coldest deliberation, for, in common with many people of passionate prejudice, she wished to appear dispassionate both to herself and to others.

She took time for reflection now, marshalling her forces carefully.

"I have never quite believed in that girl," she said at last. "I have detected her in many small insincerities and fibs. She is an arrant flirt, too. She tries to attract the attention of any and every man whom she comes across—I have seen her try to attract Siegfried, though unsuccessfully—and she is far better liked by men than by her own sex, which is never a good sign."

"My dear Harriet, all this amounts to nothing more than that your niece is not the kind of girl for whom you have naturally great sympathy."

"I am trying to explain," she went on gravely. "I know that Babette is not the kind of girl whom I naturally like and respect (I do not take easily to insincere people), and I have therefore endeavoured not to allow myself to be blinded by prejudice, or influenced by baseless fancies. It has, however, become increasingly clear to me that there is some mystery about her, and that the mystery is connected with her past life, and with some man who has a hold on her. I do not think her extravagant"—with an air of giving a devil her due—"but I am convinced that she constantly sends away sums of money. I do not think her careless; I do not believe she mislaid one of the trinkets you have heaped on her; yet I am sure she has parted with them, and that she has scarcely a jewel left in her jewel-case."

"There was some nonsense talked about the opals that I gave her!" said Sir Hubert, with rising anger. "She said that she had left them upstairs, and your tone implied that she was fibbing! The poor child was proved perfectly in the right. I noticed them on her neck at Miss Dupins' party. Of course she had them safely stowed away all the time. I wonder you are not ashamed to refer to your ridiculous assumption."

"Certainly she had them on her neck when she dined out with you. She somehow managed to retrieve them," said Mrs. Durnham. "Nevertheless, she was so

frightened when you asked her where they were that her hand shook and her colour changed. She is in collusion with someone outside the house, and for my part I suspect that she met that person to-day."

"This strikes me as very absurd nonsense," said Sir Hubert. "I cannot comprehend how any woman of your sound sense can give way to such foolish and unjust suspicions, but by your own showing you have never liked her."

"I have not liked her," Mrs. Durnham agreed; "that is true, though I do not, as a rule, become fanciful about people merely because I do not like them. I wish to remark, however, that Frank Graham was much in love with Babette. We all knew it. Julie was pleased, and you were rather annoyed by it. He changed suddenly. He never came to wish us good-bye. Jessie has told me that he begged her never to mention Babette's name to him again. Whatever her secret is, I believe that he knows it."

"Babette probably refused him. I think the better of her for that. She is sometimes a very silly baby, but there she showed her discrimination."

"No. That was not the case. Jessie has told me that her son never asked Babette to marry him, because he discovered something about her that utterly shocked him, and made him feel that he had had a great escape."

Sir Hubert, who seldom swore, swore then.

"I beg your pardon, Harriet," said he the next moment, "but this is enough to make a saint lose his temper. So when a young cad declares to his mother, in a fit of pique, that he has had a lucky escape, you seriously repeat his vapouring as evidence that there is something mysterious about your niece! Have you never heard of sour grapes, and of a fox who thanked Heaven that his stomach had not been turned by them?"

Mrs. Durnham threaded her needle with deliberation. If the needle had been a dagger she would have been pleased to have seen its point in Babette's heart.

"It is quite useless to pursue the subject. I knew

that you would not attend to any warning," said she. "I could adduce many instances of Babette's want of principle, but I will not waste my breath."

Sir Hubert wheeled suddenly round on his other daughter.

"Have you noticed any want of principle about the child? Do you suppose that there is any shadow of truth in what Harriet suggests?"

"She has not such a delicate sense of honour as we have. She certainly does tell fibs," Miss Redstone allowed, "but, then, so did poor Stephen. Babette often is very like him. As for mysteries, of course it is just possible she is in some scrape. She looked ghastly when she came in—so ungirlish and white and careworn! She said to me, 'I've been out in the dark seeing sad ghosts.'"

"Well, why on earth did you not say so before?" he cried petulantly. Do you not see that, if by any miserable chance Harriet is so far right that the poor little girl is haunted by some ghost of the past, it is our part to lay it for her? We'll have the matter cleared up." Again his face saddened. "If there is need of leniency, let us be lenient, for it is very true that she is Stephen's child."

They were all silent for a while. Mrs. Durnham longed to give vent to the remark that, in her opinion, the fact that Babette's father had behaved badly was no just reason for condoning any offence on Babette's part; but she refrained from irritating words, and presently the old man spoke again.

"Not that I see how anything can be more innocent than Babette's proceedings. Mr. Cole is a most estimable person, I'm sure, and quite old enough to be the father of a dozen Babettes. Why should the sight of that worthy man on the doorstep have filled you with misgivings, Harriet? For my part, I am heartily grateful to him."

"It was too dark for me to see who Babette's companion was," said Mrs. Durnham; then added, after a

pause, "but if you feel so grateful to Mr. Cole, you might write to tell him so."

"I am perfectly willingly to do that," said he, with a touch of defiance. He glanced questioningly at his other daughter. "Why not? eh, Julie, why not?"

Their eyes met in uneasy conference. Alas, alas! Those who have love without confidence certainly do not possess peace in their souls withal.

"I am convinced that Babette spoke the truth. At the same time, if by any chance she did not—but of course I do not think there is any such chance—in that case I could not possibly let Mr. Cole know that my grandchild had lied."

"Let us tell Babette to write herself," suggested Miss Redstone. "She will be charmed to do so if Mr. Cole did escort her home. She is never slow to acknowledge any kindness. I must say for the child that she is always grateful and responsive. If—if it were otherwise, she will make some excuse, and—and then we shall know."

Sir Hubert sighed.

So Julie was not quite sure either!

"I will send for her, and have that note written and sent at once," said he.

He rang the bell, and then turned to his daughters again:

"Mind now! I do not think that there is anything to forgive, but if there should be, I would have you both remember that I would forgive Stephen's child anything."

When Babette came into the room she was still heavy-eyed and pale.

She hoped that there would be no more inquiries, no more scenes, no more need for stories; she looked rather anxiously from one to the other.

"We have been talking together about your adventures this afternoon," said Sir Hubert (but there was no need to tell her that they had been talking of her; well she knew it!), "and I have come to the conclusion



that I should like you to write to Mr. Cole to express my thanks as well as your own for his kindness to you, and to invite him to come to tea with us one day."

Babette's face cleared. She laughed with delight. Had he said in so many words, "Your Aunt Harriet has set a trap which she hopes may catch you," she could not more thoroughly have understood and relished the situation.

"Why, of course! What a good idea! I'll write this very moment."

She sat down and wrote quickly then and there. It would be fun to see her "Aunt Harriet's" disappointment when the answer came, for, of course, her father would play her game! It was odd that it should be so, but she had confidence in him; she was sure that he would never "give her away."

When she had finished writing she held up the sheet of notepaper triumphantly.

"Would anyone like to read my note? Would you, Aunt Harriet? Just to make certain that—that it's nicely written, you know?"

"No, my dear. There is no need for that. We trust you," said Sir Hubert.

And at those words the horrible feeling of self-disgust caught Babette again. It trod on the heels of her naughty little triumph, and tripped it up. She hung her head, and put down the note soberly.

"Well, there it is! It's done, anyhow," said she.

## CHAPTER XIX

"I bring ye love. What will love do?  
Like and dislike ye.  
I bring ye love. What will love do?  
Stroke ye, to strike ye.  
I bring ye love. What will love do?  
Love will befool ye.  
I bring ye love. What will love do?  
Heat ye to cool ye."

SIR HUBERT REDSTONE and Babette were singing the quaint old words at the piano at one end of the long music-room. The old man had had a pleasant baritone voice in his day, and though he had but little of it left now, yet his exquisite style made it a pleasure to listen to him. Babette's sweet, fresh young voice rang out clear and true in the responses. It had strengthened somewhat of late under Sir Hubert's careful training. She would never have a large compass, but she had a good deal of dramatic power, and a pathetic quality.

Mr. Cole sat at the other end of the room, within the circle of light made by the blazing wood-fire. Not a word escaped him; he was extremely interested.

The tea-table had been pushed up near the picturesque open fireplace. Miss Redstone had presided over the teacups, but now sat with her pretty be-ringed fingers idle on her lap, and tapped her foot in time to the music. She had felt annoyed with Babette lately, but she was always pleased and touched by the girl's singing. Mrs. Durnham, on the other hand, disliked both the song and Babette's way of rendering it! It was but too shamelessly appropriate, thought she. When Babette trilled out "Love will befool ye,"

Mrs. Durnham would willingly have taken the swaying girlish figure by the shoulders and turned it out of the room, ay, and out of the house, too! "'Love will befool ye,' indeed," she said bitterly to herself.

"You will tire your grandfather with that long, trying duet," she remarked, when the two voices came to a pause at the end of the first eight lines.

Mr. Cole glanced at her quickly.

"Ah, that's the one who suspects," he concluded, "and she doesn't like my girl."

He had been in two minds about accepting this invitation to tea. He felt that he "was playing it pretty low down" when he accepted an invitation from the man who certainly was befooled; but his inquisitiveness about Babette had impelled, and a postscript of two words had drawn him. That is, he called it "inquisitiveness," but, as a matter of fact, his growing interest had other ingredients in it. Since they had once more met as father and daughter, he was dimly aware that they could never again entirely ignore each other. He could not vanish out of her life now as he had vanished before. It would be somehow impossible! On the whole he no longer wished to, though he foresaw unpleasant moments in store both for himself and Babette, when that apple-cart of hers should be ultimately upset.

He had her note of invitation in his pocket now—a prettily worded note, such as a girl of seventeen might well write to an elderly man who had befriended her in a fog. No hasty scrawl, like the hurried missive about the blackmailer! It was a bit of pretence written to order, but at the end Babette had scribbled a genuine invitation, for had he not been kind? Had he not helped her at a pinch? She would not have had him suppose she had forgotten that. So there was the postscript, "Do come."

"Those are queer words and a fine tune, aren't they? I dare say I may be all wrong to like them, for I don't know much about poetry, but they seem to me to have

a haunting kind of ring to them," said he. "If it were not that the lady here says that you'll be tired, I should like to hear them again so that I might remember them."

Sir Hubert was pleased at the appreciation.

"It is a trying song for me," he said. "You observe I've only one line to repeat with varying expression. Babette has all the fun ; that is why we usually stop at the eighth line. I composed the music myself, so I take liberties. You shall have the whole poem since you like it. Come along, Baby !"

"I bring ye love. What will love do ?

Love gifts will send ye.

I bring ye love. What will love do ?

Stock ye, to spend ye.

I bring ye love. What will love do ?

Love will fulfil ye.

I bring ye love. What will love do ?

Kiss ye, to kill ye."

"Hm-m," said Mr. Cole. "The fellow who wrote that knew a thing or two ; but it's not what you might call cheery."

"Love-songs never are cheerful !" Babette said. "No, granddad, we won't have an encore. I can't sing that again even to please Mr. Cole."

Sir Hubert patted her hot cheek sympathetically.

"I never let my granddaughter sing trashy words if I can help it," said he. "She has a naturally true ear for good poesie, as well as for good music. It would be a pity to spoil it. Besides, the two ought not to be divorced. She feels almost too much, though."

"Ah, Babette is so like me there ! I feel too much, and Herrick's lyrics have an especial fragrance for me," said Miss Redstone.

Mr. Cole jotted down something on his shirt sleeve ; then, seeing he was observed, smiled frankly.

"I just put *Herrick* ? with a query," he explained. "I've a friend who puts me up to things I don't know about."

"Is your friend Miss Dupins?" Babette cried, guessing quickly. "I like her, too, but I don't know that I could make friends with her. I think she might be alarming to naughty people. She is good—very good, I am sure."

She glanced at him, with a glint of mischief peeping between her lashes, as she threw down her music and came into the circle of firelight clinging to Sir Hubert's arm.

Mr. Cole nodded gravely.

"I believe you," said he. "Yes, Miss Dupins is the friend I referred to. I never had but two friends. The first was Tyler. Tylerine is called after him."

He relapsed into silence after that. He had not learnt to keep the conversational ball going when he had nothing in particular to say. At times he talked a great deal, but now he sat thinking somewhat abstractedly. Presently he rose, said he supposed it was time he went, and took a somewhat abrupt leave. He pushed aside Sir Hubert's reiterated thanks almost roughly.

"You've no call to thank me. I'd as soon you didn't," he said, and so departed.

"A delightfully unconventional soul—quite a rough diamond," Miss Redstone murmured, as the door shut behind him.

"He is certainly rough, but whether a diamond or not, I do not pretend to know," said Mrs. Durnham dryly.

"There is something attractive about the man. I think that it must be his immense vitality," Sir Hubert said thoughtfully. "He is so interested in life. He grasps it heartily with both hands just as *you* do, Baby." He pinched her ear playfully as he spoke. "Of course, in one sense of the word he is uneducated, but see how unerringly he hit on a bit of good poetry. He didn't like the words of the first song you sang (and he was quite right not to); but how he listened when you sang that lyric, although he had never heard about

Herrick before. For my part, I thoroughly enjoy his company. You show your penetration in making friends with him, my dear."

He was in high feather, so pleased that his beloved grandchild's words had been proved true. His pleasure touched Babette on a sore place, and she winced.

"Don't! You are always too good to me," she said in a low voice.

All this afternoon the old man's innocent pride in her supposed integrity had been making her very soul blush. Siegfried was right; there was only one door out; the others that she had tried led further in.

"Too good? That is fudge, Baby," Sir Hubert said cheerfully.

He thought that her aunts had been scolding her too much. The child's modesty was becoming quite morbid, this would never do.

"We'll have some young parties for you presently," said he. "Of late we've only had people of a sensible age. You need to laugh with your own contemporaries, my dear. Elderly men with views on Tylerine are all very well in their way, but they are fitter company for me than for silly babies like you! Not but what I shall congratulate Miss Dupins on her pupil. He is original, and sees through his own eyes and not through second-hand spectacles. Certainly there is something laughably incongruous about that friendship. I shouldn't have believed Laura Dupins could quite have ventured on it. That man's point of view is a world or two removed from hers."

"Oh yes, it is," said Babette. "Mr. Cole is a very different sort of person to Miss Dupins, or to you, granddad."

And then suddenly, without preparation or warning, almost to her own surprise, she flung her secret into their midst.

"He is a different sort. He comes of a different stock, *like me*. There! There it is, and I am going to tell you the truth now. I can't keep it back any longer.

Granddad, Aunt Harriet was half right and half wrong. I am a cheat, and you've all been kind to a good-for-nothing. You call me that in fun, but it is the name for me, I suppose. But my wickedness is not of the kind she thinks of. I've got no mysterious admirers. I'm not being made secret love to. That's what Aunt Harriet suspected, did she not? But it's worse than that. That wouldn't be so bad, would it? You wouldn't have minded if it had turned out that it was somebody who—who liked me, who brought me home through the fog, would you? But there's nothing like that to confess. It really was Mr. Cole who took me back, and Mr. Cole knows about me." She hesitated for a second, and then rapidly decided that she would not give him away, he might tell his own tale if he liked. "He knew my father, and recognized me. Mammy's man was not my father. Mammy's man was my stepfather. Of course I always knew that, for I was five years old when he and mammy married. When she died I was dreadfully afraid that perhaps he wouldn't care to be bothered with me any more; it was very, very good of him to stick to me, wasn't it? I got so fond of him; he taught me everything I know, and when he died it seemed as if the world had come to an end. I didn't know what to do; and then Aunt Julie came and said I was her niece, and that you were longing to welcome me. Well, I couldn't expect any welcome anywhere else. It meant a home and everything that's nice, just *asking* to be taken, and it wasn't only that"—she came to a breathless pause—"it was something else, too," she added, but her voice faltered over that plea. "I had got to feel as if I really did belong to him, and as if, therefore, in a sort of way, I might hold on to his people. I didn't think mammy's man would mind; but now I see that I don't belong to you, because you are all of you honourable and good, and I am a cheat—and every day I've seen that clearer."

Sir Hubert stared at her like one dazed. What was this that Babette was saying?

"I cannot understand all this," said he.

"Oh, granddad. It was wicked of me," she cried. "I wish now that I hadn't done it, because I have hurt you—and—and—and I *am* fond of you."

The old man took an uncertain step towards her, but then as the girl made a fluttering movement towards him he thrust her away.

"I would forgive Stephen's child anything. I told my daughters so. But if you are not Stephen's child, what then?" he cried, bewildered.

For all his alertness and energy he was old, too old to readjust his point of view quickly.

"If you are not my grandchild, if you are not my grandchild, what have I to say to you? It is nonsense—nonsense! That you should stand there and say you are not our Babette! I was ready to condone. You all know I was this time. I treated Stephen harshly. I meant to make up to you. But—but—I don't seem able to take it in," he repeated thickly.

Mrs. Durnham rose majestically. She laid aside her work, and going to her father's side drew his arm protectingly through her own.

"Go, please," she said to Babette; "you have dealt him a hard blow. Leave him a little while to recover."

"But, my dear Harriet, the poor, dear child doesn't know what she is talking about," cried Miss Redstone excitedly. "It can't possibly be true that she is not our own niece. Anyone with any sense can see that that is untrue on the face of it. Why should she be so like my poor brother if she is not his child? She is hysterical, poor little thing! Her nerves have been upset. I can understand that so well, but you never make allowance for highly strung natures. I've always said, 'Babette is too highly strung.' But as to believing these impossibilities, I know better. Babette is ours."

"Go, please, now. Go to your room for the present. We will speak to you presently," repeated Mrs. Durnham.

She paid no attention whatever to her sister. In



ordinary circumstances she indulged Julie's whims, but in a moment of crisis she ignored her.

Babette looked very wistfully at them all.

"No, I am not hysterical, and I am not yours, Aunt Julie," said she sadly. "But I wished I were too much. That is how it happened. I'll go—it is all I can do."

She went blindly to the door, stumbling a little. Mrs. Durnham opened it, and shut it behind her firmly. As it shut Babette had a queer sensation. She felt as if her real self stood, naked and ashamed, outside in the hall, and that inside the room they were all pulling her unreal self to bits, destroying that pretended child of the house, that petted, guarded, much indulged child, who, whatever might happen, could never be that again.

## CHAPTER XX

"Wise men patience never want,  
Good men pity cannot hide."

CAMPION.

WHILE she stood there, shivering slightly, surprised at herself, the front-door opened with the click of a latch-key and someone came into the hall, paused at sight of her, and remarked :

"Hullo, Babette! You and I have not said good-morning to-day. You hadn't come downstairs before I left the house. How d'ye do!"

It was Siegfried. For the last day or two Babette had avoided him. He spoke in a tone that was rather carefully casual and unexcited, but he was aware that something had happened. Indeed it was borne in on him with a flash of intense sympathy that Babette had "*bitten her way out*" at last. The curious simile that was always at the back of his mind concerning her still held true.

"They always stand and shiver like that and feel cold and shaky when they are just through," he thought.

"There's nothing wrong," said he, and spoke rather as if he were enunciating a comforting fact than as if he were asking a question.

"Everything is utterly wrong," said Babette. "I think there is nothing left, Siegfried. I've told the truth. You'll hear what it is presently. I can't tell it again just now, I feel too dizzy."

"Oh! There's no need to tell me, because, you see, I know. I've known for quite a long time," said he.

"You didn't! You couldn't know that I'm not myself," said Babette confusedly.

Siegfried laughed. There was a ring of satisfaction in the sound that startled Babette, even made her tingle with a momentary sensation of indignation.

"Yes I did! I knew it jolly well better than you knew it."

"There's nothing to laugh about! I think, however much you may despise me, you might be sorry," cried she.

"Sorry? I'm not in the least sorry; I'm glad," said Siegfried. "As for despising, that's rot. You didn't know yourself, Babette. You thought you were a person who told lies, and cheated, rather a poor sort. It was a ridiculous mistake! I never made it. I knew better all along. I knew you'd work out all right, and you have, you have, you *have*!" His voice rang out louder than usual. Siegfried seldom showed so much enthusiasm, unless it were a case of beetles. "Oh, of course I knew from the first. I may be stupid about some things, but I'm not a fool about what I like best. I dare say you are better than I know, too, but anyway I know you are not in the least what you yourself thought you were, and I do like you best, Babette—better than anything else in all the earth, or under it, or above it. Well, there you are! That's why I know, you see."

Babette felt and looked as if she were not quite sure whether she were standing on her head or her heels.

"I don't believe you understand in the least!" she said. "Siegfried, I can't explain the whole story now, but I'm not your cousin. I'm not Sir Hubert's granddaughter. His son was my stepfather. I'm no relation whatever, and I don't belong to any of you."

"Oh yes, you do. You belong to *me*, because I love you," said Siegfried. "But I won't go on about that just now, because you do look awfully pale and upset. Still, you might think it over and that—when you've time, you know. As to not being cousins, and not

having the same grandfather, and so on, it seems to me it really might have been rather a nuisance if we had been cousins. I say, where are you off to?" as Babette made a sudden movement to pass him.

"I don't know. I shall put on my hat and go away somewhere. Siegfried, you are the most extraordinary person I ever met; but I'm never going to 'think over' what you said about liking me, and you must never say such things again. I wouldn't do your people any more harm for all the world! I've done enough. Let me go, please."

"Where?" he repeated; "not out of the house. Not just now; not like this! Come, now, I won't bother you to listen to anything you don't want to listen to just yet; but you mustn't fly out of the house in a hurry. That won't do, you know. It wouldn't be fair to granddad," he added.

"To granddad? Oh, Siegfried, I *am* fond of him—I really am, though I've been wicked. And now he will hate the sight of me," she cried. "There, let me go! I am only going to my room—I promise."

"All right," said he. "Then I'll go and tackle granddad. I dare say you did give him a bit of a shock. It is surprising to see a creature come out," he added thoughtfully. "Granddad would hardly know what to make of it all—not being at all prepared." He walked into the library coolly. "The fog is still rather beastly. Is there any tea left, or am I too late?" said he.

Everyone was evidently perturbed. His mother wore an air of tragic triumph, his Aunt Julie was flushed and painfully excited, there was a tremulous bewilderment about his grandfather. Siegfried felt most sorry for his grandfather.

"What's up, granddad?" he asked. "You aren't looking a bit fit, you know."

"A most extraordinary announcement has just been made to us," said Sir Hubert, in a shaken voice. "I—I hardly know how to take it. I—I agree with Julie

that Babette cannot know what she has been saying, but in that case we ought to send for a doctor. If Babette does not know what she is saying, the right and proper thing to do, Julie, is to send for a doctor."

"Oh, come now! I shouldn't send for a doctor and that," said Siegfried. "To do that would only kick up more of a dust."

"Dear boy, you do not in the least understand what has happened," said his aunt. "A most terrible revelation! Babette has just been telling us that she is not my niece—not your grandfather's grandchild—that she has deliberately deceived us and played a part from the first moment of our meeting! I feel sick with horror when I contemplate the situation. It is true that I have had premonitions of late, but I thrust them aside. 'I will not distrust the dear child,' I told myself. I——"

"But in that case you do believe it all, Julie. Just now you assured us to the contrary," said Sir Hubert. "It seems, now, that you had premonitions, and Jessie Graham knew something, and Frank knew something, and Harriet warned me. Everyone—everyone guessed something excepting myself." He swooped suddenly and rather fiercely on Siegfried: "Perhaps you were in the secret."

"I guessed she was biting her way out. I guessed that much all along," said Siegfried; "but she's got through at the last rather suddenly. They often do. I told you she would, you know," nodding at his mother.

"I don't understand your slang," said Sir Hubert wearily, "but I suppose that what you mean to convey to us is that you were fully aware of the facts that have just been made known to me. Then I can only say that to my old-fashioned ideas you did me a wrong by your connivance. It is no longer the custom to honour parents, so grandparents need certainly not look for any especial respect; yet, as one man to another (for you are not a boy now), I say that you've played me a mean trick, Siegfried—a mean trick! At least you eat

my bread, and live under my roof, and spend my money, and for that, if for nothing else, you owe me loyalty."

The fire came back to his eyes, and the ashen hue that his grandson had noticed warmed into a more natural colour as he spoke. It was odd to note how his old spirit returned when he blamed Siegfried, while Babette's sins had so hurt him as to leave him momentarily numbed and spiritless.

"You are once more very unjust," said Mrs. Durnham. "Surely it is not your grandson, but the girl who called herself your granddaughter, who is to blame."

Siegfried shook his head, as he sat down beside her on the sofa.

"You might let the old chap pitch into me if it eases him. Can't you see it does him good?" he whispered to her.

"Babette didn't confide in me, grandfather," he said aloud. "No such luck! But she is not much of a deceiver, is she? It seems to me she was always giving away that silly old secret all along the line. Any child could see that she was bothered about something, and had got herself wound round and round with tangles. Babette has naturally got a truthful kind of a nature. No, mother, that's not nonsense; it is what I really think. She began by giving herself away to Frank Graham. That was simple of her (and I must say he's a mean cad), and ever since then she has been fluttering and struggling and really wanting to tell us all, especially *you*, granddad, for she is fondest of you at present. The way Graham took the story put her off for a bit. She would have been out of the web before now if it hadn't been for him."

"You are making foolish excuses," said his mother, in the gravely repressive tone she had sometimes used to Siegfried when he was a little boy. "And I do not see why you imagine that you know so much about her."

"Come now! I'm not without the usual senses. I can see and hear and that," said Siegfried with unabated good temper.

"No doubt *we* have all been blind and deaf," said Sir Hubert sadly. "It would not have seemed to me possible that a creature so young, and to all appearance so innocent and girlish, could have such depths in her. If this is true I have been utterly mistaken and cheated all along. I hardly know what to do next."

"Don't be in a hurry. Wait a bit!" said Siegfried.

Again his grandfather turned on him with angry suspicion.

"You are unusually ready with advice! Perhaps you have already arranged with Babette what course you will suggest to your elders? My generation is too gullible! It can't cope with yours."

"Oh, come now!" said Siegfried, with a note of remonstrance in his voice.

"I suppose that you had better go to her, Julie, and learn the remainder of the truth. Even if Babette is not my granddaughter, she is a young girl who is under the protection of my house. We must do what is best for her! Perhaps she has relatives somewhere? She spoke to me once about her mother. She said her mother came of country stock, and was a good woman. The way she spoke touched me at the time"—he caught his breath with a sound that was meant to be a laugh, but which was not quite successful as such—"but, of course, that may have been all made up. I am afraid I am an easy dupe."

"If Babette has relations alive they can't be up to much, or they would have claimed her before now," said Siegfried. "The person who stood by her was my Uncle Stephen. When he died there wasn't anyone."

"But the young woman soon got over that deficiency," said Mrs. Durnham dryly.

"She has spoken the truth now, anyhow," said Siegfried.

"That may be. I fear it is so," said Sir Hubert sadly. "In the meanwhile she has stolen more than money's worth from us. No, do not argue, Siegfried! I do not want to hear you talk any more! I want to

be alone. This is a very bad business, and I have been an old fool, but I doubt if a young wiseacre like you can help me!"

"All right, granddad! We'll leave you in peace," said Siegfried. "Babette has stolen nothing from me, anyhow! Come along, mother!" He took his mother firmly by the arm, and drew her out of the room. He was not going to leave her to prejudice matters still further against Babette.

When they were outside the room Mrs. Durnham could not resist saying:

"I am glad to hear that Babette has stolen nothing from you, Siegfried."

It was foolish of her to say that, but when is hate wise?

"Nothing whatever," said her son cheerfully. "And what's more, I believe that granddad will find out presently that she hasn't stolen anything from him, either!"

"Then you believe wrongly," said his mother sternly; "for she has stolen his affection. That is what he meant just now, and that is the meanest and worst of all thefts."

"But that is where you make a mistake," said Siegfried. "My grandfather *gave* that. He'll remember he gave it after a bit (you must let the old chap have time), and he'll remind himself that one doesn't take back gifts. He is really jolly generous and that! That is what's jolly about it," the young man averred, with his usual maddening insistence on a most inappropriate adjective; "when a thing is given it is given, and one's jolly well sure that all the jawing in the world won't make a particle of difference one way or the other."

Mother and son eyed each other with the obstinacy which both undoubtedly possessed, but Mrs. Durnham's eyes fell first. Her brief triumph over Babette had already lost its sweetness.

"I had rather you were dead than bound to a sly little adventuress," she cried.



“Oh, come now! you wouldn’t like the Antarctic fishes to get me, would you?” said Siegfried, laughing, but added, with a glint in his eyes: “Not that I see any reason for your alternative, for I do not know any sly adventuresses. They may be exciting people, but I have never met one.”

## THIRD PART



## CHAPTER I

"Virtue, how frail it is!  
Friendship, too rare!  
Love, how it sells poor bliss  
For proud despair."

SHELLEY.

THE day of confession had been a Friday; it was on the following Sunday that Jethro Cole went to see Miss Dupins with a question or two to propound to her. He knew nothing of what had happened after he had left the Redstones' house, but his thoughts were haunted by the remembrance of the tea-party.

"Would you mind telling me all that you know about the poet Herrick?" he asked Miss Dupins almost as soon as he had sat down in the one arm-chair which he regarded as solidly safe.

If there were moments when his friend felt a-weary of the rôle of teacher she never showed any weariness, but complied at once to the best of her ability. It amused her that he should treat her as a kind of walking encyclopædia, but she recognized that she also learnt from him. She presently went to the Chippendale cabinet that held her best-loved books, and, taking down a thin volume, held it out to him.

"You had better take this home, and read Herrick's lyrics for yourself," she said.

Mr. Cole smiled dubiously. He admired the slim hand that held the book, and the air of distinction about the well-shaped head with its waves of jet-black hair. He liked the well-bred tones of her voice and the nicely turned sentences, but he did not accede to her suggestion, for he knew his own limitations.

"No, I won't do that. I'm not a poetical kind of man," he said. "Now and again a certain line or verse penetrates my thick skull, and I like it, just as I like the sun shining through leaves or the line of a hill against the sky or a dozen other things I could name, but as to sitting down in cold blood to read verses to myself, why, I couldn't do it! I should laugh! Besides I haven't the time for that kind of child's-play—and Tyler didn't set any store by poetry either."

Miss Dupins put the book down with a twinge of impatience.

"Dr. Tyler seems to have been a person of strong prejudices and somewhat narrow views," said she.

"He hated women. I expect that goes with despising poetry," said Mr. Cole thoughtfully. "But what set me thinking about Herrick was hearing Barbara (Miss Barbara Redstone I should say, eh?) sing his words. I doubt she don't understand all the meaning of them, for she's a slip of a little young thing, but she knows without understanding, because she is a female."

He whistled a tune softly :

"I bring ye love. What will love do?  
Love will fulfil ye.  
I bring ye love. What will love do?  
Kiss ye to kill ye."

"Babette Redstone! It is odd you should mention her! They are in great trouble about her," said Miss Dupins.

His attention was arrested at once.

"What sort of trouble? She is not ill, is she? No? Well, I wish you would tell me just what is wrong, for I take an interest in that girl." Then, seeing his hostess was somewhat surprised, he added :

"She makes me think of a little thing I once knew—in fact, my own child."

Miss Dupins melted at once.

"I did not guess you had had a child," she said gently. "It must be most terrible to lose a child."

Her gentleness made Jethro feel mean.

"Oh, I was no good as a father, so you needn't pity me, quite otherwise ma'am," said he shortly. (His "ma'am's" still slid out when he was perturbed or excited.) "But what about Barbara?—well, I'm not asking out of curiosity, I've a reason for wanting to hear about her."

His eagerness was unmistakable. Miss Dupins was not in the habit of gossiping over her friends' affairs, but after a moment's reflection she told him all she knew.

"Sir Hubert failed to come to the prize-giving at the Lady Jane Gray College yesterday," she said. "I was there (for, though I have relinquished my post, I shall never relinquish my interest in that place). We all waited a long while for him, but at last had to proceed without him. I was afraid lest he should be ill, and I went round to his house to inquire so soon as I left the college. I did not see Sir Hubert, but I saw Julie Redstone, who told me that they had all absolutely forgotten the engagement, being almost beside themselves with grief and bewilderment over a revelation that had been made to them by Babette the day before."

"The day before yesterday? That was Friday. That was the day I went to tea with them. Go on," said Mr. Cole.

"The child suddenly declared to them all that she is not Babette Redstone, that her mother had been married previously to the marriage with Sir Hubert's son (a fact of which she had always been aware), and that she was the child of the first marriage. Her Aunt Julie—I mean Miss Redstone—said they could hardly believe this story. The old man is inclined to insist that it is a delusion, but, delusion or no, he is nearly heart-broken over it. Mrs. Durnham is less surprised, because it seems she always suspected that something was wrong, and Julie told me that she herself had been uneasy of late, because, though naturally

unsuspicious, she is very sensitive, and was convinced that Babette had something on her mind."

"Hm-m. And didn't Barbara tell them who her father was?" asked Mr. Cole.

"No. The vagueness of the confession adds to their bewilderment. The poor girl is not absolutely frank even now." Miss Dupins sighed. "I am grieved for Sir Hubert. He and I are old friends. He has been kind to me all my life, but I cannot help also feeling sorry for that poor little girl, who seems to have behaved so ill, but who must surely have been hard pressed by temptation, and who is too young to be utterly bad, and too charming. I cannot believe that that fresh morning charm, that impulsiveness and responsiveness, can go with a depraved nature."

"Oh, she is not bad," said Mr. Cole. "She is not as high principled as some, no doubt. But there, she didn't have so much of a chance. Sometimes, for all he was a gentleman, I doubt if her stepfather was such a very much better chap than her own father, after all. 'He wouldn't have minded,' said she. Now, of course, a gentleman *should* mind deceptions. One expects more of them, else what are they there for?"

At another time Miss Dupins might have endeavoured to combat the moral obliquity shown by the pernicious theory of "two standards," but just now her attention was caught by something else. It appeared that Mr. Cole already knew something about Babette.

"You say that she told you that her stepfather wouldn't have minded. Did she then confide in you?" she asked.

That seemed strange, but not impossible. Babette, she reflected, was the sort of girl who would always confide more readily in a man than in one of her own sex.

"The fact was she couldn't well help doing so," said he, "for the truth of the matter is that I'm Barbara's father. No doubt that seems a rum sort of a joke. I dare say you'll think that I might have mentioned the fact before, seeing we are friends, but I didn't want to

upset her apple-cart any more than I had wanted to upset her mother's before her. Now that she has let the cat out of the bag, I'm going to own up. I'm glad you've told me this, for I shall go straight to Sir Hubert now and offer to take my girl off his hands. It is queer, and a bit awkward for all parties, but that's what I shall do. I'm not much surprised either. It struck me last time I saw her that she'd not keep that puss in much longer. I could see the creature clawing to get out! As I told her then, she is not really made for a conspirator, in spite of all her deceiving ways. She is not cold-blooded enough. That's where she will always fail at a game of this kind."

He paused for a moment, and eyed his hostess a trifle uneasily.

"I'm afraid you are shocked," said he. "I know you've got a higher standard of conduct than I have—and Barbara and I have been a bit tricky."

Miss Dupins made no answer.

"Anyhow, I am going to do the straight thing now, and you'll understand how it was I didn't own to Barbara before."

"Your views are beyond my understanding," said she icily, and then her hot indignation broke through her semblance of coldness.

"Are you not even ashamed?" she cried. "Think of Sir Hubert! Think how his generosity and kindness have been exploited! Think of Babette! What have you not exposed her to? Her sins indeed lie at your door! Poor child, driven into such crooked ways by terror of poverty, while the father who was responsible for her, who ought to have led and shielded and protected her, stood behind the door and laughed. 'No doubt it's a rum sort of joke,' you say. If there is any justice anywhere, it is a joke you should have to pay a heavy price for. You say you are going now to do the straight thing. I should hope so. It is all you can do; but it won't prevent a very good man, who has set his heart on the child, being heart-broken over that cruel



and cowardly joke, and it won't do away with the fact that Babette has been smirched by it. What are we here for, we elderly men and women, but to succour the old, and to guard the young? How can you take what you have done and left undone so coolly?"

Mr. Cole was not a meek man, and this blaze of righteous indignation lighted an answering spark of anger in his own red-brown eyes; but he had learned to control his temper in the hard school of necessity, and he suppressed the first rejoinder that rose to his lips.

"I'm going," he said, "and I'm not about to offer excuses; but there are two remarks I'd like to make. One is that I shouldn't let you call me cruel and cowardly if you were a man, and I don't know that you are strictly fair in taking such advantage of being a woman, and the other is just this: I'm not as high-principled as you, I've often told you so; but if any chap comes to me owning he has been playing it pretty low down, and is in rather a shaky position, I don't waste time in abusing him, for I dare swear he knows at bottom what sort of a chap he is; but I help him out if I can (that is, if I think he is worth helping, for I don't go in for universal benevolence). You don't. You know some things that I don't know, but I believe I know better than you how to stand by a friend."

He smiled the sudden, sweet smile that Babette had inherited from him.

"If ever you were to slip into a hole I would like to show you what I mean; but, of course, you never are likely to do such a thing, being a lady," said he; and so left her, walking out with some dignity, and, in spite of his misdemeanours, with the honours of the encounter and the by no means ineffective last word.

Yet it was in depressed spirits that he made his way westward. He craved comradeship, and his heart softened further towards that naughty daughter who had not a little of his own character in her.

"Anyhow, Barbara isn't a Miss Too-good," he said to himself, with a somewhat rueful chuckle.

Sir Hubert was sitting alone in the music-room when Mr. Cole's card was brought to him. He had insisted on being left alone; he had refused to be comforted. It was not only his affections that were sorely wounded, but his very soul was filled by a dismayed confusion that he could not grapple with or master.

It had happened to him to experience a great revulsion of feeling—something that might almost be called a conversion at a time of life when most people suffer no more radical and violent changes. He had repented him late in life of his hardness to his son, and in token of that repentance had been ready to forgive that son's child anything; but now, behold, another earthquake! another shifting of everything! He could not stand it; he was too old! He sat with his head in his hands and repeated over and over again: "But if she is not my granddaughter, if she is not, what then?"

He had not seen Babette again. He could not rouse himself to action, but when he had read the message at the back of Mr. Cole's card he pulled himself together. Mr. Cole had written: "I have come on a matter of importance, and urgently beg that you will see me."

"Show Mr. Cole in," he said, and he stood up to receive him with an attempt at his usual kindly dignity; yet Mr. Cole noticed with compunction that there was a white, stricken look in his face—that it seemed as if his spirit as well as his body were at last touched by the weariness of decay.

"I've an awkward thing to say to you, sir," the visitor said, going to the point at once; "and that's why I've almost forced my way in. When one has a nasty job to tackle, one had better get it over as quick as may be."

Sir Hubert offered his guest a chair.

"Is it about those shares in your Tylerine ventures?" he asked. "If so, do not distress yourself about them

in any case, for I only put in what I can well afford to play with."

"No, no! I've not let you in there. That's all right enough! I wish you'd taken a few more of them for your own sake. They'll pay. And I should like to have done you a good turn, too, since I am afraid I've done you a bad one."

"I am not aware that you have done me a bad turn," said Sir Hubert.

"Well, I didn't do it out of malice," Mr. Cole said earnestly; "not by any means! The fact is I've heard this afternoon that Barbara has owned up that she isn't your grandchild, but only, so to speak, your step-grandchild, which, I suppose, is no relationship at all, eh?"

"What have you to do with my family affairs?" asked the old man.

"Nothing; except that I'm to blame for the whole d——d set out. I am Barbara's father. She is my legitimate daughter. Her mother was a honest woman, but I deserted her and the child; and that's all—saying that I am willing and ready to take Barbara now."

"That's all," repeated Sir Hubert slowly, and sank down heavily in his armchair, putting his hand before his eyes. He had been sitting just so before he had been interrupted by the footman with the card.

Mr. Cole had expected an explosion of wrath. This silence made him deeply uncomfortable.

"Miss Dupins was right. The old fellow has been hard hit by my girl and me. I wish we hadn't done it," he said to himself, and he muttered aloud shyly, "I suppose there isn't any use in saying one's sorry? I suppose it would only seem like an added impertinence?"

"No; I think there is no use in being sorry," the old man agreed, but quite gently and in a ruminative tone.

There was a pause, which the delinquent felt

"deucedly awkward," and then Sir Hubert again made an effort, and brought his mind to bear on the matter immediately at hand.

"You will, of course, produce proof of what you state. That is a matter for my lawyer to go into carefully," said he. "I was not careful before—not careful enough. In the meanwhile I do not doubt your word. I see no reason why you should tell me that you are her father—if you are not her father. There were, of course, obvious reasons why she should say she was my granddaughter, when she was not my granddaughter."

"She thought she was left alone in the world. I suppose she *was* driven into crooked ways by terror of poverty," said he, with a wry smile. "Of course it was my fault."

There was another long silence, during which Sir Hubert reflected over the situation. Hitherto he had always been a man who arrived quickly at conclusions, but to-day his brain worked slowly.

"But Babette knows now that you are her father? Is not that so? May I ask you to tell me just how long she has been aware of that fact?"

"Since the evening when we met at Miss Dupins' house at Chelsea. I did not guess she'd have spotted me (she was such a little one when I left), but she did."

"Ah! And so you declared yourself to her after dinner. I remember that you and she were a long time separated from the rest of the party. It is a pity that you did not also take that opportunity of declaring yourself to me."

"I'd have owned her then before you and everybody if she had wished it. She wasn't keen on owning *me*. And mind, I don't blame her for that."

"No? Well, she evidently thought it over. Second thoughts are wisest. Would you like to see your daughter?"

He rang the bell sharply, without waiting for the answer.

"Please ask Miss Barbara to come to me here," he said.

Babette was sitting by the window of her bedroom with her hands idle on her lap—thinking, thinking! She had hardly spoken to anyone since the confession. Miss Redstone had plied her with bewildered questions, interspersed with sad reproaches, but she had scarcely answered. She had escaped meals downstairs on the plea of a raging headache, which, indeed, was no mere excuse, for the constant strain and excitement of the last few days had told on her. She was in her white dressing-gown, with her hair in a plait down her back. There were moments when Babette looked like a very bad copy of herself, with all the colours washed out and the outlines blurred. When the summons came she started and flushed, but she was glad. She sprang up and twisted up her hair, and slipped into her tea-gown, remembering even then to don the clothes that Sir Hubert liked best. When she got to the door of the music-room, her heart was beating so fast that it seemed to have got into the wrong place, and to be thumping with heavy sledge-hammer thumps in her throat and in her ears.

"Granddad," she cried, and then stopped, for the old man standing on the hearthrug was looking at her with troubled, reproachful eyes, and her father was sitting by the fire, regarding her with a kind of rueful fellow-feeling.

"We are both in the devil of a mess, aren't we?" was what Jethro was thinking.

"But you have told me that I am not that," said Sir Hubert, "or was it not true?"

But he knew it was true. And Babette's eyelids drooped.

"This gentleman has further elucidated matters," he said. "He tells me that he is your father. I could wish that he had spoken sooner, but I am glad to find that you have a natural protector, and that, had you but known it, there was no need for your deception.

Mr. Cole assures me he can bring proof of his marriage with your mother, who was afterwards my son's wife, and also of your birth. All that of course must be verified. In the meantime I understand that you recognize him. Is that so?"

Babette lifted her eyelids and looked at her father.

"Yes," she said.

"And that you had no idea that he was alive before the evening when you met him at the house of Miss Dupins?"

"I did not know that he was still alive till that evening," said she.

"I should prefer to understand the whole business thoroughly now, if it were possible. Had you any ideas on the subject?"

Babette said nothing. Mr. Cole came to her assistance.

"Barbara didn't know, but she got seized with a sort of frightened fancy that I was alive somewhere, and that I was trying to squeeze her," he explained abruptly. "When she saw me again she found out I wasn't blackmailing her, and then I settled that job. That was on the day of the fog. There was a wretched creature who had been a lady's maid and who had got hold of her secret and who pestered her with letters, do you see? The little goose sent her money."

"Was that where your jewels went?" asked Sir Hubert.

"Yes," said she.

"You were never careless—never in the least careless, or just childishly extravagant. I—I made a great mistake there," said he.

It was as if his whole conception of the girl were tumbling about his ears, but Babette's eyes swam with tears, and Jethro Cole interposed again.

"It was my fault," he said again. "Barbara wouldn't have been afraid of a rascal if she hadn't had such a d——d poor sort of a father."

"But indeed it occurs to me, Mr. Cole, as I think it has already occurred to your daughter, that, though you modestly call yourself 'a d——d poor sort,' you are a wealthier man than I am," said Sir Hubert. "You will easily replace those small trinkets of mine, which were of no intrinsic value. I could wish certainly that you, Barbara, had told me the truth before you discovered that you had such an extremely comfortable home to go to. It would have made some slight difference, I think." He sighed. "But wishes are futile, and all that is left for me to do is to congratulate you on having reached a very assured position, where you need never again fear poverty, or resort to any doubtful measures in order to obtain what you enjoy. As I have already explained to your father, I do not wish you to leave my house till everything is absolutely proved to my lawyer's satisfaction, but I am morally certain that what Mr. Cole tells me is true. I congratulate you on all your troubles being well over at last."

"They are *not*," cried Babette passionately. "I think I have never known what trouble is till now."

Her father held out his hand to her with a touch of rough sympathy.

"Come along, Barbara," said he. "Sir Hubert has been shabbily treated by us both, and that's a fact; but all the same, he ain't fair to you now. Good people like him, and—others, can't understand sinners like us."

Babette shook her head. "I'm not going with you," said she.

"Certainly you are not at this moment," said Sir Hubert. "I do not intend to be in too great a hurry again. You will forgive me, I am sure, Mr. Cole, I do not think I need detain you longer now."

Jethro Cole walked to the door, and then stood still and looked back at the old man and the girl.

"It wasn't my money made her speak out at last. It was something else. I can't say what. Perhaps it was something *you* taught her here," said he. "You

must have taught her a lot, no doubt. You've learnt a sight more than I have ; but haven't you ever learnt to have a bit of mercy ?”

The old man stood stiff and upright.

“ I bear no malice. I do not reproach your daughter. I never shall,” he said.



## CHAPTER II

THE fog which came with the east wind and the frost turned London into "A City of Dreadful Night." In the West End the invalids shivered and wished they were in the Riviera, and the old people were kept warm in their bedrooms; but in the poor quarters the cold weather meant sharp suffering, and there people did not pine for the southern sun, but only for a few more lumps of coal and for an extra ha'p'orth of gas.

The children managed to get some fun out of Jack Frost though. They managed to even in back streets, where his glittering garments were all blackened and smudged. The O'Grady boys (for example) had made a slide all across the yard from the back-door to the clothes line. Mary Anne Tavey set her foot on it one day, and came down heavily. She stretched out a hand to save herself, and her wrist bent backwards and broke.

The O'Gradys all swooped out with loudest lamentation, but Mary Anne was fiercely cross. She likened them to vultures, much to their indignation, and she picked herself up unaided, in spite of the pain which turned her sick. She was forced to have the parish doctor, and, later on, the parish nurse. The wrist had to be put in splints, and Mary Anne had to draw on her hard-won savings.

That had all happened a month ago, and Mary Anne was making shift to do for herself again, but she looked old, and wizened, and shrivelled; the fight for life had never before been quite so hard as it was now. She tried to sew, holding the stuff between her knees (luckily, it was not her right wrist which was disabled), but she

made sad cobbles, and her customers were leaving her. She kept her room fairly clean, but it had once been spotless. She ate marvellously little, and yet she got into debt. She studied her post-office savings book with a frightened heart. She had never been afraid before; she had always felt herself indomitable in spite of the difficulties that beset her. She loathed charity, and it irked her soul to receive a gift from anyone. Sometimes when she lay alone at night she prayed that she might die sooner than lose her independence.

"O Lord, it ain't much I've asked of you, and it ain't much you've given me, but you might grant me that," she would repeat.

It was an unauthorized addition to the prayer she had learnt when she was young, and had repeated more or less mechanically ever since. The addition was not mechanical but terribly poignant, and as the days went by it rose pretty often from the decent little bed, which was no longer decked by the patchwork quilt. The quilt had been sold to a "lady friend" of the Salvation Captain's, who had a penchant for patchwork, and had paid quite a good price for it. The clock had gone too, and so had the spotted china dogs that had stood on the mantelpiece, but the shouting yellow bird still remained; Mary Anne would not part with him.

One afternoon she sat by the window and tried painfully to thread her needle. She stuck it in a cushion in front of her, and made shots at the eye with a waxed thread. She tried again and again with tremendous perseverance, but at last a few tears dimmed her pale eyes, and made the task more hopeless. She dabbed them away with angry impatience.

"You can't afford to cry! You just mind that, Mary Anne," she exclaimed sharply, for she was getting into the habit of speaking to herself, that most pathetic habit of lonely old age.

A knock at the door made her pause with the cotton in her hand.

"If that's Mike O'Grady again, I don't want him

bothering here! he may just keep his sorries to himself," she cried, for Mike O'Grady, who was soft-hearted, had expressed great contrition over "that unfortunate slide," and sometimes ran up after school-hours, braving the old woman's crossness, and offering to "threadle" her needle or do any other odd job for her.

All the same she did want him, and she looked at the door with a gleam of eager expectation. For half an hour at least had she been making futile dabs at that perverse needle.

"But it is not Mike O'Grady," said a man's voice; and the door was pushed open, and a square-set, grizzled stranger stood before her.

He wore broad cloth, and a collar, but was certainly neither a clergyman, nor a rent-collector. Mary Anne supposed he must be the new parish doctor, though he did not look quite like a doctor either.

"You've mistook the flat," said she tartly. "It's Mrs. O'Grady that's in the family way again. She lives below. I suppose she's sent for you, though I must say I don't see why she and nurse shouldn't manage without. It's a woman's job *I* say."

The man laughed. Of whom was it that his laugh reminded her?

"Well, I won't intrude on Mrs. O'Grady. How are you, Miss Tavey? You don't remember me, do you? I should not have recognized you either at the first glance, but I should know your voice anywhere."

Poor worn-out old enemy of his! She had shrunk to skin and bone; while he, the reprobate, had prospered and grown stout. There was no mistaking the extreme bareness of the tidy room. Nearly everything had gone out of it. There was hardly a stick of furniture left. She eyed him intently.

"Do I know you? It doesn't seem possible——"

"Many's the time you scolded me," said he. "But this"—pulling his beard—"was red, not grey, in those days. You used to tell me I trucked in dirt and——"

"God forgive us! You are Jethro Cole!" cried she.

She clutched the seat of her chair on either side, as if holding herself up with difficulty; her eyes started with dismay. Her genuine horror disconcerted him.

"You never had a welcome for me, but you needn't stare at me as if I were the devil," said he.

"Barbara!" she gasped. "If you was alive all the time——"

"She never knew. Barbara was all right. While she lived I'd never have let the cat out, but it is out now, and I've come here to talk to you about my daughter."

Mary Ann Tavey covered her face with her hands.

"Poor Barbara Mary Anne! Oh, poor girl! She had no business to play the trick she has played, and so I told her, but she's paid out since you are still alive."

"I was a brute in those old days," said Jethro humbly. "And naturally my daughter isn't over and above proud of me, but I don't know that it is a bad thing for her that I am alive after all. I don't mean it to be a bad thing for her. I mean to do the best I can now, anyhow. I didn't split on her. She told that fine grandfather (who wasn't hers by rights) that she had deceived him, and then I came forward and owned up to her. It was a nasty half-hour for us both. I don't think that there is any doubt in Sir Hubert's mind that I am Barbara's father, but having been a bit hasty before, he is careful this time. His solicitor is coming to see you on the business, you having been godmother and present at the birth, too! That's what I've come to explain to you. My daughter and I, we've thrown down our cards, so to speak. You can just tell all you know. You'll enjoy telling the gentleman what a bad lot I was," he added, and made a funny wry face—it was just the same half-comic grimace that Babette made when she felt rueful.

"I'm not going to run any risk of getting Barbara Mary Anne into trouble, and I'm no chatterer," said Mary Anne. "Shocked I was, indeed, when she told me of the game she was playing. 'You takes after

your father more than a little,' I says to her. 'And bread and water and a plank-bed here, and hell-fire hereafter, is what you are making yourself liable to,' I says, for I don't believe in mincing matters to the young; it's no true kindness. All the same, I'd sooner go to gaol myself any day than have a hand in putting her there, and you never know what a lawyer mayn't do. Your Mr. Solicitor won't get much information out of me."

Jethro Cole laughed.

"You are a whole-hearted friend, Miss Tavey, and you ain't by any means a half-hearted enemy. But no one wants to put the girl in prison—Sir Hubert Redstone least of all, I should say. Poor old chap! She has hit him hard, and I doubt if he'll ever forgive her, but he won't want that sort of thing. He only intends to be sure there is no deception this time, and then he'll hand her over to me, and, mind you, it won't be such an unfortunate job for Barbara after all."

The old woman studied him dubiously.

"You don't *look* to drink now," she owned. "And you don't speak as rough as you did—you never were a bad sort when you were sober—and you've got on a fine coat. Can you give Barbara Mary Anne a good home?"

"Not so bad," said he, with a twinkle in his eyes, and pulling at his beard. "I suppose you have never so much as heard of Tylerine, for you never were interested in anything outside your own beat?"

"It's something I've seen advertised. I don't pay no attention to advertisements unless it's pills," said Mary Anne.

"It isn't pills; it's a substitute for indiarubber. It's a substance I've hit on—that is, Tyler and I got near it together, but Tyler is dead. It is bringing in a lot of money. You remember how I always hankered after those Polytechnic classes? I had a turn for chemistry. You and Barbara used to say it was useless stuff, eh? but it's made my fortune, Mary Anne!"

"Then you are a lucky fellow," said Mary Anne wearily. "The most of us work till we are worn out, and then we drop into our graves, and good for us if we wear out quick enough to save us from charity. That's what we pray for, and it ain't much—but there! (pulling her mind out of that worn rut with something of a jerk), but there! I'm very pleased to hear you've enough to keep Barbara Mary Anne in comfort."

Jethro glanced sharply at her.

"I owe you something, old-enemy," he said. "My wife and my child would have starved if it had not been for you. I should like to pay off some of that debt now."

He put his hand in his pocket and drew out his purse.

The old woman eyed it hungrily. Its contents might save her from the Union, but after all, her intrepid spirit was stronger than her body. All her life it had ruled, and now that she was nearing death it was master still.

"No," she cried, and sat bolt upright, and waved the purse away. "No, Jethro Cole! What I did I did for Barbara, not for you! Pleased she would have been, poor dear, if you'd taken the right turn in her day. She was one as loved a man, and she'd have made you a good wife if she'd only had the chance."

"I know that," he said shortly.

"A beauty she was, a deal better-looking than Barbara Mary Anne, and meant to be happy and good and to live peaceful and die in old age with a family round her. But there! the best years of her life was spoilt because of your drinking madness, and she died afore she was three-and-thirty."

"She died another man's wife. Was her death my fault? No, it wasn't," said he.

"The doctor as attended her said as she must have been struck a blow on the breast years before, that brought about what she died of," said Mary Anne mercilessly.

That saying of the doctor's had rankled in her heart for years. She had kept her stone and turned it, and now at last she threw it, and it hit the mark, for Jethro Cole winced.

"I never struck my wife but once, and then I wasn't myself," he said. "It's too d——d unlucky if that once did it."

"So that being so, I thank you kindly, but I won't take a farthing from you. You may buy other things, but you ain't going to buy me," said she.

Jethro Cole put his purse away and stood up.

"Very well, Mary Anne, have it your own way!" He turned to go, then looked back at the spare, small figure, with the bent, thin shoulders and the unbending spirit looking at him out of the pale blue eyes. He liked pluck. "But not all your own way, for I am going to shake hands with you, whether you like it or no." He strode across the room, and took the cold, clawlike hand in his grasp and shook it. "For the sake of what's past, and of what's going to be," he said, and so left her.

At the bottom of the stairs he met Captain Sargent of the Salvation Army, who accosted him.

"May I ask if you are a friend of that old lady upstairs, sir?"

Mr. Cole smiled wryly.

"That old lady upstairs would not demean herself by calling me friend! Why do you ask?"

"I hoped that you might be," said the Captain, "for she badly needs one. I hoped that you might possibly be someone who had employed her in better times, and had come to look her up."

"I certainly knew her in better times, and, now that I come to think of it, I occasionally made a good deal of work for her," said Mr. Cole.

"Poor old soul! She is past making work for now, though the working instinct is still alive," the Captain said sadly. "She has done her share too."

"Near starving, eh?" said Jethro. "I guessed as

much; and as cantankerous as she is empty. She won't let me help her, not if she knows it! Not but what it might be done without her knowledge, eh?"

He turned and walked along the street by the Captain's side, and they plotted together for Miss Tavey's benefit. Jethro always trusted or mistrusted at first sight intuitively, as women do, and his intuitions about people were seldom wrong. He was not a religious man, and Captain Sargent's point of view was alien to him, but that made no difference to his liking. He liked an honest soul when he met it, quite irrespective of the opinions it held. At the corner of the street they came to a public-house.

"Ah—I remember that. (I lived in this part once.) It was the only warm and cheerful spot about."

"A Devil's trap," said the Salvation Captain.

"Quite so!" said Mr. Cole, and then laughed. "Tyler told me about an adventure he had once with a tribe of savages, who beat a big drum to keep off the Devil. You do that too, eh? Well, well, I'm sure I wish you good 'luck.'"

"Thank you," said the Captain.

He was not usually much attracted by people who wore collars and watch-chains, but he liked his present companion.

"You've got up in the world, I take it?" said he. "But you've not forgotten what it is to be down," he added, with a flash of friendliness, for it was not everyone who would have gone out of the way to be secretly kind to an old woman who refused bounty.

"I know that if the under dog means to be top dog he must fight hard," said Jethro grimly. "And I believe I know the worth of the sort who'll sooner starve than cadge. There aren't too many of them, and they're dying out. I've a respect for Miss Tavey, but I'm not kind; I'm only trying to pay back part of what's owing to her. I wish all bad debts could be paid in money!" he added ruefully. "They can't—you can't buy the best, nor you can't make restitutions either in



cash. You soon feel that, unless you've got a hide like a rhinoceros. That's the bother of it."

A gleam came into the Salvation Captain's eyes.

"Ah, that was why Christ——" he began eagerly, but Jethro stopped him.

"Now, don't, don't," he said. "I know you are quite honest; but I can't abide preaching. It turns my stomach, and that's a fact. Let it alone, there's a good chap, and let's part friends."

And the Salvation Captain, having some glimmering of common sense, refrained.

"God be with you, friend," he said, and so they parted.

But Jethro Cole went back to the Tylerine Works with a sore heart. In the intervals of business, during the next day or two, he swore now and again at Mary Anne Tavey.

"D——n the old witch! Why did she tell me? Why? Because she wanted to dig her old claws into me. Why do I think about it? I won't. There's no use in harking back."

But he did think! That arrow had poison in it, and he had no one to whom he could go for distraction or comfort. He was really pitifully lonely. His work interested him, and he always flung himself with avidity into whatever he was doing. He cared about the perfecting of Tylerine (he was more and more glad that he had thought of calling it after Tyler rather than after himself); it was becoming a colossal monument to Tyler's memory, but he cared curiously little for the immense wealth that accrued to him. If he had had a son it would have been different! Of course, he might marry a young wife and have a boy yet; but the idea of the young, well-born, gently nurtured creature who would "put up" with him for the sake of his money made him shake his head.

"They *do* it, poor souls! but I'm d——d if I'll have a hand in that game!" he said to himself.

He had seen something more of society since that fateful little dinner at his friend's house, and it had

been brought home to him that "they do it." Somehow he felt increasingly sorry for girls, and he took increasing interest in making preparations for Babette, who would be obliged to come to him now, whether she liked it or no.

He told Mrs. Higgins that he was expecting shortly to have his daughter to live with him.

"You'll have to brush up when Miss Cole comes here," said he. "You bet she won't put up with your mucky, untidy ways as I do."

Mrs. Higgins was dismayed. Though she despised her employer (for what gentleman says "you bet" to his servant?), yet the billet was advantageous.

"I'm sure I 'ope the lady will be satisfied," she said. "Any lady as *is* really a lady knows what is possible for one pair of hands, and what isn't."

This was adroit, for it implied that the measure of Miss Cole's satisfaction would prove the measure of her gentility.

Mr. Cole laughed. "But any woman who is a woman knows that much," said he. "They aren't nearly so soft as we are. I've often noticed that about 'em."

The prick Mary Anne had given him hurt him again as he spoke. It was making his temper uncertain. He wouldn't himself have said that to any chap. No, he wouldn't, not even if he had believed it to be true, and it wasn't true, surely.

"Have you ever heard of cancer being brought on by a blow on the breast, Mrs. Higgins?" he asked, apparently apropos of nothing.

Mrs. Higgins averred that she had heard of it, and delightedly entered into the gruesome details of a case she had known. Jethro listened so attentively that she guessed he had a personal reason for his query, and she spared him nothing. Not that she meant to be cruel, but merely because she loved sensation.

"That'll do," poor Jethro said at last. "I've had about enough, Mrs. Higgins."

He couldn't eat his supper that night, though it was rather better cooked than usual. He ate a biscuit and drank a glass of whisky and water instead. It was long since he had touched spirits, but to-night he felt as if he must. He did not exceed, though; the thought of Babette stayed his hand.

"There ain't any danger now. I've had it well under for years, but still, I'm not going to touch the thing at all when my daughter comes to me. She shan't see anything to remind her of what I was," he said to himself, and then frowned. What a pity that she remembered anything! "Lord! I wonder if she knows what Mary Anne told me? I wonder if she believed it?" The wonder kept him awake that night. "Perhaps *that's* why she does not want to come to me. She must come, though, for there isn't anywhere else for her to go."

Miss Tavey had told him bitterly that his daughter was "well paid out for her sins" since he was alive.

"But if Barbara knows, *I'm* well paid out," he groaned.

### CHAPTER III

THE solicitor got nothing out of Mary Anne Tavey, who presented to his inquiries a front of impervious stolidity, guarded by extreme deafness; but her attitude made no practical difference in the long-run. Jethro Cole succeeded in proving his relationship to his daughter without much difficulty, and during the course of the most painful month that Babette had ever experienced.

No one behaved as she had once expected they would behave if the truth were revealed. She saw now that there could be no question of being "kicked out into the streets," or of policemen and prisons—possibilities which had lurked at times in the background of her mind. An older adventuress would have known her world too well to fear such improbable dangers; but, though life had sharpened Babette's wits in some ways, she was still pathetically young, too. Mary Anne Tavey's warning about the plank-bed and the bread and water had impressed her. That, to her mind, was what she had quite possibly let herself in for when she confessed; but yet, at the moment of confession, she never thought of those gruesome contingencies, because Sir Hubert's stricken face gave her more pain than visions of gaol.

"I didn't understand how much he would care," she said to herself; for, indeed, old as humanity is the cry, the plea of Divine love for all of us, that, after all, we know not what we do.

There were long consultations about Babette behind closed doors. There were letters from the lawyer;

there were letters between Sir Hubert and her father. Nothing was done in a hurry this time. These spurious relations were filled with a deep sense of responsibility for the ultimate safety of this wicked little thief of their affections. No one spoke harshly or upbraidingly to her, but she went about among them like a dim shadow of her former self, very silent and enigmatical, and with all her sparkle gone; for when one has been accustomed to be the recipient of the happy, lavish gifts of love, it is painful indeed to receive instead the dues of kindness, charity, and responsibility.

"Your father is coming to fetch you the day after to-morrow," Sir Hubert announced one day just as they finished lunch. "I have to go to Hereford this afternoon, and shall be away for some days. You will not be here when I return."

Babette's eyes besought him, but he would not meet them.

"The taxi is ordered at three o'clock, is it not?" he said, turning to Mrs. Durnham. "Are you coming to the station with me, Harriet? and have you brought down those labels?"

"Couldn't you say good-bye to me?" Babette said wistfully.

How grey he looked, and how old! And it was all her fault.

"Good-bye," he said gravely. "I hope that you will be happy and well cared for, and that your future will be as assured and free from discomfort as you can desire."

"Couldn't you call me Babette once more? I didn't invent that name. I always was called by it," Babette said, with a choke in her voice. "And—and I am truly sorry. I—I wish I had never been born!"

The passionate, futile wish seemed to break itself against a wall.

The old man made as if he had not heard her. Mrs. Durnham got up deliberately.

"Come, father, the luggage labels are in the library," she said.

She was thankful to get him away. In her innermost soul she felt that there was no knowing what wiles that little sorceress might not yet cast over him. Babette, heavy-eyed, and sad, and penitent, was still dangerous. She hardly breathed freely till they were in the train, and steaming out of the dun atmosphere of London into a wintry daylight. The sky was a pale blue, flecked with curly white clouds. The frosty rime lay on the hedgerows. Mrs. Durnham sighed with relief.

"It is good to get away into this purer air," said she.

But her father answered sadly, "We are purblind creatures, Harriet—purblind and blundering as bats in the sunshine."

His extreme depression touched a chord of anxiety in her.

"Dear father," she said, crossing over to his side of the carriage and seating herself beside him, "do let us put that miserable affair out of our minds for ever. When we get home again that"—she swallowed an adjective—"that girl who deceived you will have gone to her own father. You have dealt most generously and leniently by her. Do not let the thought of her trouble you any more."

He put the back of his hand to his forehead with a distressed gesture, that she had noticed only of late.

"She is *not* Stephen's child. I must remember that. She is only a changeling, a stray, wandering changeling, who crept into our home on false pretences. I must keep that clearly in mind. She said she was 'truly sorry,' but I suppose that did not mean much. I would not look at her. It is better not to look at her, lest one believe in her again."

"I never saw much to look at myself," said Mrs. Durnham tartly. "But, of course, I know that she fascinated some people. She had pretensions to prettiness. If she had really been Stephen's child, she would probably have been handsomer and better grown."

"I wish she had been really my grandchild. I did not want her to be handsomer or better grown. I was quite contented with her as she was. If she had really been Stephen's child, I would have forgiven her anything."

Clearly in that case there would have been nothing to forgive. Mrs. Durnham made the reflection, but did not give vent to it aloud, for Sir Hubert's mind had better be turned to other matters. He seemed to her to be curiously muddle-headed and unlike himself to-day. Only when he repeated that futile wish, she said at last with conviction, that even where one's own were concerned it was not wise to be too forgiving.

The train shrieked just then, and they plunged into a long tunnel. When they emerged from it, Sir Hubert was sitting upright and looking at her with a smile.

"Well, you are often right, Harriet," said he. "You are not as theoretical as Julie, but you are often quite right. Yet when we get out of the tunnel, out of that last, darkest passage, you know, I doubt if that's the sort of mistake that troubles most of us. I don't think we shall look back and say that we've been too forgiving."

Mrs. Durnham was a literal-minded person, and it took her half a minute to grasp his meaning. When she did so, she felt a pang of increased uneasiness.

"If this trouble about that bad girl shortens my father's days, I will never forgive her," she promised herself sternly.

She and her son were the two members of the Redstone household whose original estimate of Babette remained unchanged by the revelation that had occurred. The penetration of hate had always perceived a coil of mystery; the deeper penetration of love had always seen the fluttering soul in the midst of the coil. Both now held themselves proven right.

When his grandfather and mother left the room Siegfried lingered behind; an unwonted tenderness transfigured his plain face.

"Don't—don't mind like that," he said. "Grandfather will come round some day, you'll see."

Babette shook her head. For a moment she could not speak.

"Well, it served me right. I shouldn't have bothered him with saying I was sorry. He doesn't believe a word I say now, and I suppose one can't expect that he should," she remarked at last. "Do you know what he thinks? He thinks I just waited till something offered that I thought better than what he gave me, that when I found my father was quite rich and respectable, then I made up my mind to confess. I can't disprove that by talking about it. It looks like that, doesn't it? Do you think that?"

"Oh, come now!" said Siegfried reproachfully.

He was so seldom reproachful that she was ashamed.

"No, I know you don't. I beg your pardon," said she, sighing. "You *don't* think horrid things, even when you well might. For the minute I remembered Frank. I don't know exactly what it was that Frank thought about me," she added, and blushed suddenly crimson up to her eyes. "But I believe that it was something even worse than the truth, and that's bad enough."

"Don't go on bothering about that ass," said Siegfried. "He doesn't matter, you know. You fancied he counted, but he doesn't. You do get rather silly fancies sometimes. You *are* good, you know."

"I wish I were," said she. "Siegfried, do you guess what I am thinking of doing?"

"I'd much rather you told me."

"Well, then, I'm thinking that I won't go to live with my father at all, but I'll go and work for my own bread and dripping somewhere, and be poor and horribly uncomfortable."

"Have you made up your mind where to go?" asked Siegfried. He never expressed surprise at Babette's vagaries—indeed, she did not surprise him. She always seemed to him quite natural and intensely interesting.



"My mind is not made up quite, but I have an idea in it," said she.

"Well, I should think it would be quite easy to find a place in which one could be thoroughly uncomfortable," he remarked dryly; and in the midst of her sadness Babette laughed.

"Oh yes, there is never the least difficulty about that. Do you remember the Salvation Captain whom we met at Mary Anne Tavey's? He said to me once that he could see that I fancied I knew life, but that I did not really know it, because I had never felt hungry or thirsty after righteousness, but that he believed I should some day. I do begin to—to want to be good now—as good as you think I am. Then perhaps some day granddad will see that it was not because I discovered I had a rich father that I confessed, and then he may be comforted, and that perplexed disappointment won't always look out of his eyes whenever he looks at me."

"You are awfully fond of granddad," said Siegfried, and suppressed a sigh. "But look here now: it would be jollier for *me* if you didn't insist on being uncomfortable during the time I'm away. You see, this expedition may lead to other things. Anyway, I don't mean to be dependent on my grandfather any more. Something the old chap said yesterday made me feel I had better not, you know. Well, now, after I get back—if I do get back—we might be married, eh?"

"Oh *no*, we mightn't. We never could. Don't, Siegfried. I don't want you to say these things. You are the one comfortable sort of friend I've got," she cried ruefully.

"Yes; but I should just like you to tell me why not," said Siegfried persistently. "If it is because you don't like me enough yet, why, there's no more to be said—at least, not just now. If it is because you believe my people will cut up rough about it, why, I am *not* my people, and you ought to take me by myself. It would be fairer, because you stand by yourself to me. I don't

care a hang what *your* people were like, Babette. There never was, and there never can be, anything in the world I care for as I do for you. You have got into everything. All the funny, queer, beautiful things in Nature remind me of you. All that I can't talk about or understand seems to have its answer in you when I watch you, and I shan't ever care less, you know, because—well, of course, you are about the prettiest thing I've ever seen—but it's you yourself, not your prettiness, that I care for. I've been thinking about that lately, because I met a poor woman who was marked with smallpox the other day, and I thought how sorry I should be if it were you. It would seem such an awful pity and that, but I knew it wouldn't make any difference to my caring about *you*, not any at all. I should see you through it somehow; and I've never felt like that for anybody else. Now, tell me, please, which reason is it which prevents your agreeing to marry me when I come home?"

"Both," cried Babette quickly. But she was more touched than she wished to show. "Both. I don't feel like that. I don't want to. I don't want *you* to. I would rather not. To love people always means that one must have trouble. But supposing I did—even if I did very much—still, I would never marry you. I couldn't. Not now. Not after what I've done. Just think, Siegfried, what it would mean. 'The sly little adventuress, not content with stealing into his house, managed also to marry Sir Hubert's grandson.' That's what they would say. I couldn't do it. I'm not good enough for you, but I'm not bad enough, either, to do that—not even if I cared, and I don't."

He listened very carefully.

"Well, then, I'll wait," said he.

"No, don't wait—don't, or you'll spoil all our friendship. Give up the idea. It is what you'd call 'Jolly silly and that,'" she cried, trying hard to laugh.

Siegfried observed the attempt at flippancy without moving a muscle.

"Don't you worry; I won't spoil anything. I'm a most awfully careful chap really," he said; and so, with a cheerful nod, left her.

Babette heard him whistling "Yankee Doodle went to Town" as he went upstairs. She had often heard him whistle just so, with pauses and very softly, almost under his breath, when engaged in something that required delicate manipulation. He certainly did not behave like a rejected suitor, and Babette, listening intently, laughed, but it was a sad little laugh, and on the wrong side of her mouth.

The butler came into the room to clear away the plates, and Babette learnt from him that Miss Redstone had come in and was in the boudoir. She went there, and knocked rather timidly at the door. There had been a time, not so long ago, when she had been sure of a welcome as "flowers in May," and even now Miss Redstone received her with embarrassed kindness.

"I want to go this afternoon to see that friend of my mother's who lives at Bermondsey," said Babette. "You won't mind my going there, will you? The day after to-morrow Mr. Cole is coming to fetch me away altogether."

The poor lady looked puzzled. She really hardly knew how to behave to this girl, who was not her niece after all. Moreover, she was fond of Babette, and, even though her heart was perhaps not quite so irretrievably broken as she averred, she was genuinely grieved and shocked by all that had transpired.

"The day after to-morrow? You leave us the day after to-morrow?" she repeated.

"Yes," Babette answered. "And, you know, Aunt Julie, it really will be more comfortable for you all when I am gone. There is no use in prolonging the agony, and it is dreadful now. Why, you simply can't bear the situation. You have to accept invitations to lunch every day in order to escape from it."

"Oh, Babette, and I was so fond of you!" cried Miss Redstone. "When I think of our first meeting I ask

myself over and over again, 'Why did she not confide in me? Why did she not tell me everything?' "

Babette might truthfully have replied, "Because you utterly refused to listen." But an ungenerous aptitude for recrimination was not among her faults, which was one reason why she was often well loved in spite of them.

"If you only had had confidence in me I should have stood by you, and so, I am convinced, would my father," Miss Redstone went on to say earnestly.

Babette drew a long breath.

"Would you have done that? Yes, I believe you would have," she said. "But I didn't know that then."

"As to this afternoon, I suppose you can do as you choose—that is to say, if Mr. Cole has no objection to your going to Bermondsey. It is your duty to consider him now."

A half-bitter amusement flashed for a moment in Babette's eyes. In those bad old days, which she honestly wished never more to remember against him, "considering her father" had meant considering how best to keep out of his way when he was drunk.

"Mr. Cole won't have any objection to my going to see old Mary Anne," she said, and so presently started to pay her second visit to Bermondsey.

## CHAPTER IV

"'Tis manna that thou askest, not a stone."

M. COLERIDGE.

BABETTE did not encounter Siegfried in the Underground Railway this time, and she scarcely gave a thought to the depressing dinginess of the streets. She walked quickly, her mind too troubled to notice the outside world. It was not till she stood again in Miss Tavey's room that she was shocked back to a sense of her surroundings; then, indeed, her quick sympathy was roused, for the poor old woman was sadly changed. She seemed to the girl to have shrunk together—to be sitting in a heap, with shoulders bowed, and with dogged hopelessness written on her face, as she stared dolefully at a fireless grate.

"Why, Mary Anne, dear Mary Anne, you are just the ghost of yourself! Oh, why did you not send for me? Why didn't you let me know you were ill?" Babette cried, and went down on her knees by the forlorn figure, and, tearing off her gloves, began to rub the cold fingers between her own.

"Barbara!" said Mary Anne. She started, and clutched the girl's arm. "Why, I thought you was dead!"

"I am not Barbara. I am her daughter; I am Barbara Mary Anne, that's all," said Babette. "Not such a fine figure as my mother, you know—nor nearly so nice, but all the same, you might have sent for me."

"Barbara Mary Anne? Barbara Mary Anne?" repeated the old woman doubtfully; and then her memory

woke, and she roused herself, "of course I know you. You are the one as is liable to a plank-bed and bread and water. Yes, and there's been a lawyer here asking questions about you (but he went away as wise as he came and no wiser), and Jethro has been here, too—him we thought was dead (though I always had my suspicions, for they don't die so convenient), and he has turned out quite well-to-do and respectable. Ah, I s'pose that's why you're going back to him?"

"No, it's not. I am not going to him," said Babette shortly.

She rose from her knees and glanced round.

"It's bitterly cold. May I find some kindling and light a fire?"

The old woman laughed joylessly.

"No, you mayn't. It ain't worth while to break up this chair, and that's the only kindlin' I've got. If I'm lucky I'll die in it, but if the Lord won't see fit to attend to my prayers, they'll take me to the union infirmary, but not with my consent—never with my consent."

Her obstinacy looked out of her pale-blue eyes, indomitable still.

"If they do that, they'll have to carry me," she said.

"They shan't; we won't let them!" cried Babette.

"But a fire we must have, Mary Anne!"

She wasted no more words, but ran down to the basement where the O'Grady family yearly increased. Mrs. O'Grady was in bed with her fourteenth baby, but Mike came to her assistance, and, aided by him, she carried up a bucketful of cinders, coke, sticks, and a sprinkling of coal, also a kettleful of water. She paid Mike outside the door for these commodities, and further despatched him to make sundry other purchases.

"She'll be fierce with ye; she can't abide charity," Mike said.

When he returned, the kettle was on the boil, and Babette proceeded gaily to roll up her sleeves and prepare a meal. Handy she certainly was, as Mary Anne had always remarked. Her craving for luxury had had

no element of helplessness in it; she liked things to be done prettily and perfectly, and loathed the slipshod and unfinished.

"Think how many meals you gave to my mother and me," said she. "Don't grudge me my turn now."

Her father had said something of the same sort and been repulsed, but Mary Anne could not stand out against Babette, nor against the smell of food which she badly needed.

So they ate and drank, and good-will came in and made of the meal a sacrament, warming their hearts to each other, and a tinge of colour came back to the old face. Babette was unhappy enough in the depths of her soul; but yet companionship did her good, and so did the affection which she might lawfully accept.

"I've never cheated you, Mary Anne, have I? and there is no reason in the world why I shouldn't let you like me," said she wistfully.

"I don't know that there's much to like," said Mary Anne severely. "You've not behaved correct, nor been all you should be, by a long way, Barbara Mary Anne; but, there, as to 'letting,' you can't let nor hinder love—it don't walk with reason nor listen to reason, but quite the contrary. Why, the fire has caught your skin, my dear; you've got as red as a beetroot."

"Tell me how the Salvation Captain is getting on," said Babette, hastily changing the subject. "Hasn't he looked after you at all?"

"I've given Captain Sargent notice to quit," said Mary Anne. "I looked out of my window the day when your father came to see me, and I saw the two walking and talking together. They was talking about me, and how to circumvent me, and I ain't going to allow it. I won't be under an obligation to your father, Barbara. It was along of him your poor mother got the disease from which she died. He may be as prosperous as he likes now, but I don't see that he's so much better than a murderer. I don't care to be under an obligation to

any such. He was drunk when he struck her, and he's sober now. I am glad he is, for your sake ; but I haven't forgotten, for I don't see that it's a thing that ever should be forgot, and so I told him."

"Did you tell him that? Oh, poor man!" cried Babette quickly. "I think that even if I were very angry (and I have sometimes felt angry at the remembrance of him) I shouldn't have the heart to say that to anyone—besides, we don't know that it was true. Mammy might have died anyhow."

Mary Anne snorted. "Shouldn't 'ave 'ad the heart. Now, that is a way of speaking that makes me sick. It is *right* that people's wicked doings should be brought home to them. I don't hold with all the mishy, wishy-washy softness that's talked nowadays. Wouldn't 'ave 'ad the heart to tell 'im! It's *he* as shouldn't 'ave 'ad the heart to do it. But you haven't got any principles nor any conviction of sin, Barbara Mary Anne. To my mind, you're a deal too like your father."

It was the second time that Mary Anne had remarked that likeness. The first time the girl had resented and contradicted the assertion; now she only looked thoughtful over it.

"Well, perhaps I am," she said; "but I want to be good now. Do you think your Salvation Army Captain would help me to set about it?"

"The Captain is over at the Jubilee 'All in — Road. They've got a meeting at four o'clock this afternoon. If you were to step round presently you might find 'im. I don't know that I hold with that lot. Too much drum and shoutin' for me. I like something orderly and decent myself. Your mother and me was both brought up Baptists (that was what made me take to her at the beginning), but Jethro Cole, 'e 'ad no religion. I suppose your pore step-papa was Church, seeing he was quite the gentleman in 'is ways and manners."

Babette shook her head.

"I don't know. I don't think that he believed in anything much. He liked me to go to Mass when we



were in France ; he said it was better for little girls to say their prayers."

"To Mass!" cried the old woman, horrified. "Then he tried to make a Papist of you, and I'd always thought of 'im as a harmless, soft kind of gentleman. To think how we're deceived in 'em! To Mass, and you an innocent child! Not but what you were always sharp. I am afraid you learnt a deal of wickedness there, my dear; and now that I hear that, I ain't surprised that you haven't acted as honest as you should."

"No, Mary Anne, the wickedness was born in me! I never learnt it at Mass!" said Babette.

The old woman had finished eating now, and Babette washed up and put the plate, and knife, and fork away.

Mary Anne watched her deft movements with secret pleasure.

"Well, I'm glad you've spoken at last," she said, "for I had got thinking of nights about all you're liable to, and I didn't like it. I couldn't bear you to go to prison; nor I shouldn't like you to go to hell, either," she added; "though if the Lord is just, He'll bear in mind that what you've done wrong is owing to your father and to your stepfather, too. The one ill-treated your body and the other your soul, it seems. Mass, indeed! A sink of iniquity I've always heard. Now I wish you would go to ask the Captain's advice, my dear. He'd know how to put them Mass ideas out of your head."

Babette laughed. She was never argumentative, and Mary Anne on the Mass struck her as merely funny.

"I will," she said. "And after that I'll come back here before I return to Melbury Road. To-night will be the last night I shall sleep there."

"But you are not to talk over me, nor my business, with the Captain. I don't hold with accepting favours from 'im," Mary Anne said, with sudden suspicion. Her pride seemed to Babette almost insane.

"Of course not! Why should we talk about you? *Your* soul is all safe anyhow," said Babette.

She made up the fire again, and then ran downstairs. There were one or two necessities she meant to get for Mary Anne before she left the neighbourhood. She would finish her shopping first, and then, perhaps, look in at the Hall. The meeting would be crowded, noisy, and obnoxious. She shrank from it in anticipation.

She paused for a minute to say a pleasant word to the O'Gradys, for to be "pleasant" came very naturally to Babette, and as she lingered someone called.

"Miss Cole—oh, Miss Cole, may I speak to you for a moment?"

Babette never thought of herself as Miss Cole. When she was with her stepfather she had been called Babette Rothenstein, and of late she had been Babette Redstone.

She would have paid no heed to the call had not Mike O'Grady called her attention to it.

"Why, it's the Captain spakin' to you, and it's a fine bit of mendin' me and he has been about in the yard," said he.

Babette turned round then and saw Captain Sargent coming through the back entrance. She was glad to see him again, for it was strange how his spare figure, bereft of one arm, had haunted her. His words had followed her like a prophecy. She had not consciously paid much heed to them on the day when they had had tea together, but she had never forgotten them. He had stood for those great factors to which she had meant to shut her eyes, for sacrifice and religion, for those very potent powers which, whether we will or no, reach crosswise to the heights and depths of life.

"Mike and I have been patching up a bit of furniture for Miss Tavey," the Captain explained. "But Miss Tavey is very angry with me: I haven't the pluck to offer it to her. I was glad when I heard you were here, for I thought perhaps you would persuade her to accept it."

Babette smiled up at him. "That doesn't sound very brave."

"No, I'm not at all brave," said he, smiling back.

She followed him into the back-yard and examined the table with interest, thoughtfully rubbing her finger over the deal surface. The leg had been neatly repaired. It was quite a serviceable article.

"She certainly needs a table," said Babette.

"She needs pretty nearly everything," the Captain agreed. "I'm giving up my room to-day. This isn't worth taking away. I wish she would let me leave it."

"Poor old dear! She isn't easy to help. You've been kind, I know," said Babette.

"It's a kind world, taking it all round," said he, "especially among us poorer folk, but you are kind yourself, Miss Cole; if you were not you would not take the trouble to come here. There was a gentleman here last week, another old friend of Miss Tavey's. He wished to help her, too, but she doesn't like men; she will have nothing to say to him. He was a namesake of yours, but Cole is not an uncommon name."

"Probably that was my father," Babette said, and the Captain wondered why she should blush over the statement.

"It seemed to me that he was very kind also," he said.

"Yes; I should think that he might be that—I think that he is," Babette said, though she spoke rather in the tone of one making a discovery about a stranger than of a child speaking of her father.

It was rather queer, but the Salvationist made no comment, for he was not in the least inquisitive, and was, besides, more interested in the affairs of old Mary Anne Tavey than in the affairs of Babette.

Yet in the next moment, as she looked up from the crack on the table, which she had been pursuing with her forefinger, he knew that she was about to speak of something that was of pressing import to herself, and his attention quickened. He was accustomed to hearing confessions at odd moments, and from all kinds of people, because he had himself known trouble,

and was dominated by an aspiration. In times of stress the weary and perplexed do not go to the critic (though no doubt he has his uses), but to the practical idealist.

"Do you remember that you once said something about being hungry and thirsty after righteousness," said she. "Well, if that means wanting to be good, I begin to want that now. I want to feel clean and not ashamed. I want to be quite different from anything I've been before. *You* know about these things. Tell me how to set about it."

The Salvation Captain's face lighted up with the immense satisfaction of the recruiting-officer who recruits for the Leader he loves.

"There is only one way. He is the Door," said he. "Only One who can help us to goodness, and He was nailed to a cross."

The girl held out hands that had become soft during the last six months of sheltered life. The palms were pink like a child's.

"I *hate* pain," she said. "I never like even to look at a crucifix, but I believe now that I would rather run nails through my hand than have honourable good people, like Sir Hubert, despise me for the rest of my life."

The Salvation Captain looked at her pityingly. Many had come to him saying in effect, "What shall we do to be saved?" Sometimes they wanted to be saved from trouble in the next world, sometimes from the pains and penalties of sin in this life. He felt sadly that very few sought the Master out of pure and disinterested love.

"Yet a bruised reed shall He not break," he said to himself; and aloud he asked gently:

"But what have you done that you should be despised, you poor child? Whatever it may be, remember that it is only blind-eyed men and women who despise. He who was Himself the Despised and Rejected of men never either rejects or despises."

"I suppose I've done the worst thing," said Babette, and he wondered greatly, but waited.

"Till quite lately I never thought it was so bad. I deceived good people who trusted me, and stole their affection. I stole other things, too, but they really matter less, and that is what I didn't understand before. I stole the chance of having comforts, and pretty clothes, and nice manners, and music, and lessons of different kinds, and all sorts of nice delightfulnesses that I had always rather longed for. Of course, I knew all along that *that* was wrong. But I thought that was the worst part of it, and that their being so fond of me (they *were*, you know) rather made up to them for my naughtiness. I tried to be pleasant, anyhow. But now I know that it is the other way round. The most awful wickedness was not that I took their money on false pretences, but that I stole granddad's heart, and that then I broke it. It's that which is making me unhappy now."

The tears were running down her cheeks. Among all his penitents, none had come to him before in quite this frame of mind. Generally they were more distressed about their own hearts being broken than about their grandfather's. He was somewhat perplexed, too, as to the facts of the case. "But, surely, if you are so fond of your grandfather, and he of you, he will forgive whatever you may have done against him," he said.

"But he is not my grandfather. That's where it is," said Babette. "There is no reason why he should be fond of me, and he would not have been if he had known. I don't believe he *can* stop now!" She dried her eyes fiercely with two little hard dabs. "No one can ever stop being fond of someone because of good reasons, at least that's what Miss Tavey says. And though I oughtn't to be glad, I *am* glad they can't."

"Do you think you could possibly tell me the story from the beginning?" said the Salvation Captain.

"It began a long time ago," said Babette. "It

began with mammy's man, and he was my stepfather. I took to my granddad from the first because he reminded me of my stepfather. I don't think that they were really alike, but the tones of their voices were alike (I suppose that's natural, as they were father and son after all).

"There had been a quarrel, and granddad hadn't heard of his son for years and years. He knew so little about him that he didn't know whether he had children or not, or in which year he married. When they found me all alone in the boarding-house they thought I was the real daughter of mammy's man. They just took it for granted, and though of course I wasn't, yet in a way I *was*. There are other kinds of daughters besides flesh and blood daughters, aren't there? I used to think that the man who had been kind to me and taught me was ever so much more my father than that other. You see, I didn't know; I just only hated that other. . . But then one day I met him face to face. I had been afraid that perhaps he wasn't dead after all—something had made me fear that—but when we really met he was not what I had fancied. That creature, that sort of a bogey-man who drank too much, and was brutal and horrible, and who wrote threatening begging letters, was not him at all. The real father is——"

Babette paused a moment, trowning and considering.

"Well, he isn't a gentleman like granddad, but he is successful and strong and rich—sometimes now I wish that that were not so."

"Why?" asked the Salvation Captain.

He was listening with his heart and soul as well as his ear, but this was a difficult tale to follow.

"Because granddad thinks I just waited till a successful rich father turned up—and then I was ready to leave him. That isn't so. I've been wicked, but I am not doing just that. It breaks his heart to think it, but nothing I say will make any difference. It must be

something I do. Can I come and be a Salvation lass, and live in barracks, and wear frightful clothes? That is what I've been wanting to ask you? Would you take me?"

The Salvation Captain shook his head. He did not laugh, because he was a simple-minded person, who never laughed at anyone in difficulties, but he certainly had no intention whatever of enlisting Babette in the Army.

"No I wouldn't," he said. "You see, Miss Cole, our officers do not live plainly because they want to prove their disinterestedness to their grandfathers, but merely because they are on active service, and no one who is actively engaged can afford to be hampered by needless impediments."

"Well, anyhow, you give up nice things. Just now, that is what I want to do," said Babette.

She did not understand, but she never forgot the look that came into the man's eyes—the pride and joy in it, the loyalty that does not stoop to bargain.

"Oh, we do not claim any merit on the score of giving up," said he. "What we gain is so infinitely in excess of what we lose that the loss is not worth counting. To my mind the Army will be in a bad way when it begins to gabble about renunciation. Renunciation indeed! That's not the spirit in which to join. Who would not renounce a child's toy cap for the crown of eternal life, or this world's honour for a "well done" from the Captain of our souls?"

"Why, lots of people wouldn't, you know," said Babette, shaking her head at him, with her queer little one-sided smile. "*I* wouldn't, you know! So you think I shouldn't do for the Army?"

"You know best. All that is required is single-hearted devotion. If you have that, you will do; if you have not, you won't do," said he.

"Then I won't do, of course!" Babette said, with a rueful shrug of her shoulders.

The Captain looked at her very kindly. She was a

little heathen, no doubt ! Yet something in her touched him.

"I am afraid *I* have no message for you," said he. "There are times when I do not feel that I am the right emissary. But I have not the faintest doubt that one will be sent—not the faintest doubt."

"How very curious that is!" said the girl.

He left her then rather abruptly. She was still standing in the back-yard and looking after him with that rather pathetic doubtful smile on her lips.



## CHAPTER V

"She came adorned hither like sweet May,  
Sent back like Hallowmass or shortest day."

THE Salvation Captain walked fast, for it was high time he got to the meeting; besides which, in his most secret soul, he was a trifle afraid of the allurements of the eternal feminine. He walked so fast that he presently collided violently with someone, who swore rather profusely, though in a good-natured and friendly voice, and the Captain, pausing to apologize for the collision, and also to rebuke the bad language, saw that he had run up against Mr. Cole.

"You are coming from Miss Tavey, eh? How is the old woman?" asked Mr. Cole.

"Starving obstinately," said the Captain.

"What a plucky old hen it is! Spiteful, but plucky!"

"Miss Cole has been with her. I left her standing in the back-yard," said the Captain, and Mr. Cole quickened his steps.

He found Babette standing in the back-yard still, pensively regarding the table, about which she was not thinking at all. She looked up at his approach. She was surprised, but not sorry, to see him.

The red winter sun pierced the fog and glowed between chimney-pots, throwing a momentary glamour over the squalid place. A thin black cat crept along the top of the wall, fixing suspicious topaz eyes on them. Someone flung a cabbage-stalk out of a window at it. The cabbage-stalk shaved the wing in Babette's hat, but the cat evaded it with the easy agility of practice.

"Lord, Barbara! it's queer that you and I should be together in this old yard once again," said he; "so fine as we are, too!"

"Did you come to find me? How did you know that I was here?" asked Babette.

"I went to Melbury Road first, and your grand aunt (but she's not to be that any longer, eh?) sent word that you had gone to Bermondsey to see a friend of your mother's. Somehow I didn't relish thinking about all the bad old tales she'd be telling you against me. I thought I'd just come to interrupt 'em."

It *was* queer indeed! Memories of all sorts peeped out at Babette and at her father as they stood there. They were not very happy memories, on the whole. He suddenly noticed the scar under the curls on her forehead as the last faint rays of light touched her.

"But once you made a boat and helped me to float it in the bucket," the girl cried eagerly. "And you often gave me sweets."

He laughed gruffly. He knew that she was trying to recall a pleasant recollection, one that could convey no reproach.

"Well, I'll give you better sweets now," he said. "But there's no use in trying to whitewash what I was. All I can say is that I *am* something quite different. I want to talk to you, Barbara, but this yard's too full of eyes."

"I must go up to Mary Anne again before I go home. I wonder if I could carry this table up?" said Babette.

"I'll carry it up for you in a minute or two," said her father. "But you and I can't talk comfortably before Mary Anne. Anyway, *I* can't, for the old witch hates me like poison. Come outside and take a turn along the street with me first."

Babette followed him at once, and he seemed relieved to be outside the yard.

"Phew! I can't stand that place," he said, and Babette guessed that the memories it recalled were

too many for him. She entirely sympathized with his feeling on the subject.

"Home? It isn't your home any more, and it can't be easy for you over there," pointing with his thumb over his shoulder—"that is, unless you've got a thick skin, and, judging from what I've seen of you, I should say you haven't," he remarked.

"It isn't easy. The situation is impossible, and, of course, I know I must go. All the same, it has been a home to me, and I've loved it," said Babette sadly.

"I mean to do well by you now, Barbara," said he. "Why did you tell that old chap you wouldn't come to me, eh?"

Babette looked up and down the squalid street. Should she ever be able to make him understand why? Yes, she could; he had understood once before.

"Isn't this horrid? Don't you dislike the drab colour, and the smell, and the awful dulness, and everything that belongs to the kind of lives that people live here?" said she. "I do, but I mean to stick to this."

"Why so?" asked he.

"Because I've found out that there are worse things still."

"Oh!" said he. "Do you believe that to be with me would be worse than poverty, Barbara?"

"No, no, no!" she cried warmly. "But it's what I *do* will count, not what I say; in fact, I don't get the chance of saying anything. If I go to you now, Sir Hubert will be bitterly sore about me always."

"You've got as fond as that of that old man?"

She nodded. "Yes. He is so honourable. One may be bad oneself, but when one sees someone very good one can't help admiring. It's dreadful to have done harm to what one admires. It makes one feel meaner than dirt."

"H'm-m," said Jethro. "You're a rum girl, Barbara, but you are not dirt. Well, but where could you go, if not to me?"

"I had thought of joining the Salvation Army," Babette said rather shyly, "but Captain Sargent wouldn't have me; he didn't encourage the idea. He said their people didn't join in order to prove their disinterestedness to their grandfathers, but for quite another sort of reason." She blushed. "I suppose you have to be religious. I am not religious," she explained.

Jethro laughed suddenly and heartily.

"I suppose it's funny," said his daughter wistfully. "I am glad I made you laugh, for it's nice to laugh, and you have been kind to me. I have not laughed myself for weeks and weeks."

"Captain Sargent is a sensible chap," said Jethro. "Now, look here. You'd much better come along with me to-morrow. You've no other plan, eh?"

"There's Mary Anne," said Babette.

"Oh, d——n Mary Anne!" said he roughly. "Why should she have you?"

"She would if I asked her to," said Babette. "And I believe that I could do her work and pay for my keep. I'm not stupid, you know. I'll tell you what makes me think of it. Once Mary Anne wrote to me and offered to give me a home. It was just after Aunt Julie came to the house where mammy's man died. If it had been just before I might have accepted her offer, though I should have hated it. It would have been like tumbling backwards—at least, I thought so then. I refused. It was the chance of being honest, and I refused. Now I am sorry. Now I feel that if I could turn right round and do that very thing I wouldn't do before, I might some day feel clean again. It—it would be a struggle, though."

A gleam of intense comprehension in her father's eyes startled her.

"Did you suddenly turn round and do exactly the contrary to what you had done all your life?" she asked.

"I did, and it was the saving of me," said he. "But Tyler backed me," he added gratefully. "Mind! I

shouldn't have got through if Tyler hadn't believed in me."

"I haven't got a Tyler!" said Babette lightly, but then some thought touched both her face and voice to a gentler expression. "Yet I know that it makes a difference if someone is so foolish as to believe that one is really good," said she.

They had reached the end of the street and turned back again.

"I can't walk much more," Babette said. "I used to walk quite long distances in France, but I overdid it, and now I get tired easily."

Jethro glanced down at her.

"Yes, you give out suddenly. You run out of spirits and then your strength goes. Well, come along. I'll carry that table up for you."

He followed her upstairs, carrying his burden so that it should not touch the walls, for he never handled anything awkwardly. He and his daughter were alike in a certain deftness of touch that was the physical counterpart of tact. They found Mary Anne looking far more like her former self than might have been thought possible a few hours before. The warmth of fire and food had revived the poor old body, and the warmth of companionship had lent new life to the brave old soul. Though Mary Anne would rather die than go to the Union, she was by no means tired of life; for it is not the poor who are in a hurry to die, nor the hard fighters who come to the conclusion that all is vanity.

"I've not been to the meeting," Babette said; "but I met Captain Sargent. He was wondering if you would mind taking care of a table for him? He didn't like to bother you, but it costs a lot to store things, and I shouldn't fancy he had much money to spare."

Jethro, treading on her heels, grinned to himself.

He guessed that that was her way of putting the matter. An artful puss! Yet he was increasingly drawn to her.

"My father kindly carried it up for me," she added,

a trifle nervously, as he carefully planted it in the middle of the room.

"Good afternoon, Miss Tavey; I should like a talk with you," said he. "For though you were never my friend you were poor Barbara's, and *this* Barbara's, too, and she and I have owned each other."

Mary Anne looked sharply from the burly figure of the man to Babette's slight daintiness.

"You two will be as thick as thieves now," said she acidly.

Jethro Cole leant against the wall and took a tobacco pouch from his pocket.

"D'you mind if I smoke a pipe?" he asked. "I'm not naturally a placid man, and a pipe prevents my losing my temper. A pipe is friendly in an unfriendly place, eh?"

"It don't matter," said Mary Anne sadly. "I used not to hold with pipes. That was one reason why I never hankered after marriage. Men make such a deal of smoke and muck one way and another. They may be all right in Buckingham Palace, but if you've only got one room there's no keeping it decent with a man in it, and I've liked decency. But now I can't keep my place as I did anyhow. My heart's broken over it, and if you do smoke or if you don't it's not much odds."

The man lit his pipe accordingly, and smoked for a minute in silence. Babette perched on the bed, for there was no chair to sit on, and watched her father somewhat anxiously. She knew that he was inwardly debating something, and that the something had reference to herself, but Mary Anne's tired old mind could not concentrate for long on the present; it turned back again to the past.

"Barbara was made very different to me. She couldn't be satisfied single, though she was as respectable a young woman as you'd find between here and the Land's End, and deserved better than she got," she said.

"She might have got worse," said Jethro coolly. "She might have got a skunk for her first, who would

have upset her apple-cart, or a brute for her second, who would have misused her girl. But there's no use in going back on what's past; it's what's *to be* that we have to think about. Barbara, my wife Barbara, is in her grave. She has done with this business, and sorry or no, we can't help her any more. Barbara, my daughter Barbara, is alive; and you and me, Miss Tavey, want to help her to make as good a job of life as she can, eh? I take it that that's what fathers are for, and elderly female friends!"

The old woman looked questioningly at him.

"Well, it may be that you do mean well by Barbara Mary Anne," she allowed, though she allowed it grudgingly.

"I do," he avowed, "and I've been turning facts over since you spoke in the yard just now," nodding at Babette. "I know what turning round means, too! Self-respect is an article one can't buy back without paying a stiffish price for it—not if one has once lost it. A fancy price, if so it must be!"

"Oh, you really do understand!" Babette cried.

"So, do it—do it! I'm not here to prevent you; I'm here to back you. Come and stay here with Miss Tavey, if you choose, and be d——d uncomfortable if that's the physic for you."

"I don't understand what you are talking about," said Mary Anne. "I am sure I don't wish neither Barbara Mary Anne, nor anyone else to come to see me if it makes her uncomfortable. She invited herself to-day (and for the matter of that so did you, Mr. Cole), but she, being her mother's daughter, is welcome."

"Which is more than I am," said Jethro. "But you'll have to put up with my company now and again if you have Barbara! Now, look here, Miss Tavey, here's my proposition. Let Barbara have that little room that Captain Sargent had. She can pay the rent he paid, and she can do a bit of work for you till you're better. That's fair enough, for you did many a hand's turn for her and her mother. She can keep you out of

the Union, and pay off some old debts. Now, is that what you really want?" with a quick glance at the little figure on the bed.

"Yes," said Babette.

The prospect was uninviting, yet her courage rose half defiantly. He was not sure of her, she knew that. If she had said "no," he would have laughed, not ill-pleased, and would have bidden her come home with him then. He would have been kind to her, quite kind; but they would both have known that she had shirked that complete turning round that he himself had once gone in for. The fancy price would not have been paid by her.

"Nonsense, your girl can't come here now," said Mary Anne; but there was wistfulness in the denial. "She's grown like a lady. I don't approve of the way she's acted, but you can't throw her down into another style of living now. You're doing a cruel thing if you do, Jethro Cole. Dressed as you are, too, and with all your talk about your Tylerine business, I should say you could afford better than that for Barbara Mary Anne."

"He is doing what I asked," said Babette. "He is not cruel—not in the least cruel."

The father and daughter looked at each other, and both smiled.

"Oh, come along! We'll look at the diggings, with Miss Tavey's kind leave," said he.

"You may look at the back room, but it's unsuitable," said Mary Anne. "Barbara could have stayed there well enough, but not Barbara's daughter. As for paying debts, there's some who always lends and some who always borrows, and so it will be as long as this world lasts. In the next that will be put straight, no doubt," she added, rather grimly.

"True for you," said Jethro Cole. "Still, Barbara and I do seem to have got a hankering to pay before the Last Judgment, eh, Barbara?"

He pulled her hand through his arm when they stood side by side in that tiny back room. It was not dirty,



for Captain Sargent had seen to that with his own hands, but it was depressing. There was a bit of linoleum on the floor, and there was a barrack-bed and a scrubbing-brush and washing utensils. There was also a text hanging over the bed, "Faint, but pursuing." Jethro Cole whistled, and his heart smote him.

"I don't hold you to it. I won't jeer if you give in, Barbara," said he. "I don't half like it."

"Nor do I," said Babette; "but I'll do it."

"But if Mary Anne won't have you, what then?"

"She will if you leave her to me. "She's longing to," said the girl. "She's taken to me very much. Oh yes, I know she has. One always knows who likes one."

"I'd like to have you, too. Mind, you may throw it up and come to me when you choose," said he.

"I'll prove I've some grit first, anyhow," said Babette.

"I shall go to Melbury Road to fetch you to-morrow at twelve o'clock."

She thanked him for that very prettily, and so he left her to tackle Miss Tavey alone, and went home himself in very thoughtful mood. He was not an undecided person, as a rule. He usually made up his mind with great celerity; but he was not at all sure now whether he had done right by the girl, who, after all, was incontestably *his* girl.

"For she is like me," said to himself—"warmer hearted, of course, because she's a female, and prettier mannered by the same token. She wouldn't ever have taken to drink, for she's dainty throughout. Yet she's like me."

The likeness somehow fostered a late awakened sense of parental responsibility, and he wondered what Tyler would have advised—but, then, Tyler never understood women, and presumably had never had a daughter.

The next day Babette departed from among the people who were not her people, but who had welcomed her so gladly, and with whom she left a bit of her own heart, even though she had so wrongfully stolen theirs.

"I came in with acclamations and joy and flags

flying, and I trickle out at the back door ashamed," Babette said ruefully.

That was not literally true, of course, for Mr. Cole came in a taxi-cab to fetch her, and Miss Redstone melted into tears at her departure.

Babette came into the music-room with her hat and coat on, ready to go. Siegfried was standing by the window looking out; Miss Redstone was wandering restlessly about the room.

"I've tried to explain to Hannah, but I can't. She *will* believe in me," Babette said. But perhaps she had not tried very hard. Then she looked doubtfully at Miss Redstone.

"Do you think you could possibly forgive me?" she asked. "I know I have behaved abominably, but it was very tempting. I wanted so much to be your niece."

The good lady hesitated. Harriet would say that speech was very adroit, that it was just the sort of flattering plea that Babette shamelessly made use of in order to gain her private ends. Harriet, alas! had been proved so horribly right!

Then a something, a quiver of the lip, a shade of expression that crossed the girl's small, pale face, touched her.

"Dear child, I forgive you. I cannot bear malice I am not like Harriet. I cannot help forgiving," she cried, and kissed Barbara warmly. "Besides, I suppose that I was to blame, too. I ought to have been more circumspect; but I am like my dear father, I am of an unsuspecting nature. Yes, I forgive you, and I hope you will be happy, after all, Babette."

"I shan't. I shall have a perfectly horrid time of it," Babette said solemnly, and yet with a kind of triumph in her voice. "I am not going to be comfortable and happy. I am going to be uncomfortable and to work hard, and no one in all the world detests hard work and poor living more than I do!"

"But, my dearest child," cried Miss Redstone, "surely you are talking great nonsense!"

She was taken aback and considerably startled. The term of endearment slipped out unawares, and brought tears into Babette's eyes.

"Surely you are, for Sir Hubert tells me that your father is well on the road to being extremely wealthy. There can be no question of poverty and discomfort."

"I am not intending to live with my father, but with Mary Anne Tavey, who is quite a poor old woman. I shall help to keep her customers. I can make blouses very nicely, and I shall sew my fingers to the bone," said Babette.

Siegfried turned round at this and entered into the conversation in a tone of amicable remonstrance.

"Come, now, I don't call that a very good plan. You'll be ill there, for those houses aren't well drained. I shouldn't do that if I were you."

"But you are not me. You would never have done any of the things that I have done," Babette said.

"But I shall not allow this," said Miss Redstone, "for, however disappointed Sir Hubert may be, he would never wish you to encounter hardship. He said I was to see you safely under your father's protection."

"My father knows all about it. You will see me under his protection, for here he is," Babette said.

Mr. Cole was announced at that moment. Miss Redstone had not seen him since the day he had had tea with them, and had listened so appreciatively to her niece's singing of Herrick's words. She drew herself up, not offering to shake hands with him. She wondered that he ventured to come into the room, and no doubt the situation was awkward.

"I have just come to fetch Barbara, ma'am," he said gravely.

There was always a directness of purpose, and an entire absence of self-consciousness about him that lent him a certain dignity.

"I hope that you mean to take her home with you," said Miss Redstone. "And that this silly idea that she has just been propounding is not encouraged by you."

Jethro Cole pulled his beard and glanced at Babette with a twinkle in his eye.

He guessed that she had put off divulging her plan till the last possible moment, lest she should be prevented from carrying it out.

"It was not my plan, but I let her do as she likes," he said. "It don't seem to me fair play to do otherwise, not under the circumstances. I didn't bring her up, and therefore I don't claim authority over her. If I had brought her up, I should act otherwise."

Miss Redstone looked helplessly from father to daughter, but Babette put an end to the curious little scene by suddenly putting her arms round her.

"Since you have forgiven me I may kiss you, Aunt Julie, mayn't I?" she cried, and suited her action to her words.

"Good-bye, good-bye," she said. "Thank you for all you have given to me. I know that I stole some of it on false pretences, but I am sure that some of it was given to *me*, myself, not because I was supposed to be your niece, but just to me."

Then she held out both her hands to Siegfried, but that young man shook his head, and did not take them.

"Oh no, I'm not saying good-bye just yet. I know my way to Miss Tavey's quite well," he remarked.

"I don't want you to come there," said Babette.

"Come, now, but the streets are free and that," Siegfried replied cheerfully.

So there were no more touching partings, and Babette suddenly turned away and ran out of the room where she had been both happy and unhappy and out of the house she had learnt to love, and took refuge quickly in the cab.

At first she kept her head turned from her father while they drove through the streets, and he knew she was swallowing an inclination to tears. Presently she looked at him with a very resolute smile.

"To-morrow I shall go round to see all the people who have employed Miss Tavey and ask them indi-

vidually to give me a trial," said she. "I've made blouses for sale before now. I used to do that in France sometimes, though 'under the rose,' for mammy's man didn't like it. I know what I'm going in for"—with a sigh—"and I really am very quick at my needle, and," she added thoughtfully, "I can often coax people into doing what I want."

"I bet you can," said Jethro Cole.

## CHAPTER VI

THE long, dark winter was over, the sap was rising in the branches, and spring was showing her sweet face tentatively and with many shy withdrawals, when Frank Graham came home on sick leave. He had had a sharp bout of fever in Constantinople, but the sea voyage had done him good. He was thinner and browner than he had been, but hardly any longer an invalid.

Mrs. Graham was not well pleased at his return. He had only been gone six months, and she had expected him to be absent from England for three years. She had made her plans accordingly. She was by no means one of the mothers who like to have their boys constantly within their reach. Though she could be indefatigable in her practical endeavours for the furtherance of his career, yet too much of his company wearied her. Too much of anyone's company wearied her.

At the bottom of his heart Frank was aware of that fact. To tell the truth (but it was not a truth he acknowledged to himself), he had always been a trifle afraid of his pretty and charming little mother. He had always intuitively known that there was a hard quality even in her affection, and a diamond-like edge to her sparkling wit. She despised failures, and those who despise failures are not soothing people to be with if you are sick, sorry, or unsuccessful.

In his school-days the fear of her pungent scorn had counteracted her son's natural indolence. She was never a scold, but, nevertheless, she had pricked him on. Frank had never been at all stupid, but without

that sharp little spur he would have been too slack to win a single prize.

"It isn't a bad report, mummy. Lots of chaps get much worse reports than that," he had once said, years ago, watching her pretty eyebrows raised superciliously while she read.

"Not bad, but just 'so-so,'" she had replied. "Just 'so-so,' and I don't save and scrape for that. If we were rich people, like the Redstones, no doubt you might afford to be 'so-so'; as things are you must find out how to do better, or we can give up Harrow, and you can train at Pitman's for a commercial line. Mind, I shall not blame you if you can't rise beyond 'fairly good.' I am just telling you in time, that's all."

And she was so inexorable under all the Dresden china fragility, that her son never doubted she'd be as bad as her word—and he had done better.

There were moments now when he felt just like that unsatisfactory schoolboy with the mediocre report. No one could help getting a fever, but his mother's attitude made him acutely uncomfortable.

He had been at home for three weeks before he asked after the friends in Melbury Road. He was shy of the subject, and yet wanted to know if anything had transpired about Babette.

"Sir Hubert and his daughters have gone abroad," his mother told him. "The house is shut up. The old man has been out of health for some time. Siegfried is going as naturalist on the 'Cygnet' expedition. You've heard that, I suppose? I always suspected that his family underrated Siegfried, and now we know it. They found him dull, but the really dull person is negative, and Siegfried has most positive qualities. Unfortunately they are not the kind of qualities that his musical genius of a grandfather, or his artistically minded aunt, or his dense mother (with her adoration for her own family), were in the least capable of gauging. Artistic and literary people can be singularly stupid at times."

Frank shrugged his shoulders. He was uninterested in this analysis of Siegfried's relations to his family.

"But he is a dullish chap," he remarked.

"The person who appreciated him was that little Babette," said his mother, and noticed that at that Frank "pricked up his ears."

"Ah, Babette! By the way, where is she? You've never mentioned her in your letters. Has she gone abroad, too?" he asked.

He tried to speak lightly, but the casual carelessness of tone was a little overdone, as Mrs. Graham, who had gone through some hard thinking of late, observed.

"Oh, I know where she is, and I know who she is, Frank," said he. "Babette is no more Sir Hubert's granddaughter than I am. I suppose that you found that out before you went away? Sir Hubert's son was her stepfather."

"Her *stepfather*!" cried Frank. He flushed painfully. He felt suddenly ashamed, relieved, angry. What an ass he had been! But why on earth had she not been more explicit? Why had she held her chin in the air, and condescended to no explanation? "Nothing is true; neither you, nor I, nor anything in all the world;" that was all the enlightenment she had vouchsafed him. He could not have guessed the truth by instinct, though now that he was told he saw that it was true.

"Why, of course! Why did I never think of that?" he cried.

"What did you imagine?" said his mother. "But never mind; it does not matter. Perhaps you had better not tell me what you fancied. You were taken by surprise, and you misunderstood, but the mistake is not irretrievable. Now is your chance; if you want to make your peace with Babette, act now, quickly. She is in a back street in Bermondsey. She is playing at poverty, just as she once played at being rich. Go and join in the game, Frank. Go and rescue your pretty will-o'-the-wisp from her dingy surroundings. To-morrow it may be too late."



For the life of her, and though she wished to be diplomatic, Mrs. Graham could not keep the slight flavour of cynicism out of her speech. Something in the more emotional and impulsive temperament of the girl was radically antipathetic to her, but never, never would she allow personal feeling to deflect her from pursuit of the main chance.

"Frank must marry money, for he will never be able to make it," that had been the upshot of her thinking. The young man had brains, and he had heart, but grit was lacking; she had tried to put it into him, but she could not, and there is no use in shutting one's eyes to facts.

To put backbone into the backboneless is beyond the power of cleverness. She realized that—and she also realized something else. She saw Mr. Cole's colossal and increasing fortune, and she pictured the man himself, as she had actually seen him, wandering apart from the others at the "At Home," at — House, with that little Babette at his side. The slum was only the *mise en scène* of a passing game. Babette would be the adored of her father, as she had been of Sir Hubert. If she married Frank, no doubt she would manage him, too. In the meanwhile that was her own business, and Frank took a good deal of management just then.

"Who are Babette's own people? Who was her real father? How did it all happen?" he asked.

"Her father is the Jethro Cole, of whom all the papers are full. He is the man who invented the new substitute for indiarubber."

"Then why on earth was she wandering over France with a down-at-heels musician masquerading in her father's place? Why on earth is she now in a back slum in Bermondsey?"

"Don't ask me! Ask her!" cried his mother, laughing.

She did not intend to answer too many questions; it was as well his curiosity should be whetted, yet her

laugh was less merry than it sounded. When Frank rose from the breakfast-table, and pushing aside his unfinished coffee, went moodily away, with an uncertain step, she frowned and shook her head. Son or no son, she could not help despising the man who sighed when he should have acted.

The next few days were irksome to them both. Frank was not free from recurrent attacks of aguish fever; his temper, like his pulse, was uncertain. Mrs. Graham did not pet him too much; she wanted him to foresee advantages in a home of his own and a devoted wife.

On the other hand, she kept her temper, knowing that to lose it would mean the loss of what influence she possessed. Besides, family quarrels are undignified and underbred; no woman can really afford to be spattered by their ugly dust, and this little lady was a daintily clad person, whose manners were in as good repair and as tidy as her clothes.

She saw clearly enough that Babette had wounded his vanity, and she tried (not unsuccessfully) to apply the right balm by hinting that the girl's own heart had been sorely hurt.

"Your will-o'-the-wisp danced no more after you left. She confessed everything suddenly. Julie (who loves to analyze motives, you know) declares that the song she had just been singing touched and worked on her. That is so like poor, dear Julie. For my part, I believe that your horror at the deception had something to do with it. You were both angry, but when you were gone your view of the case weighed with her."

"Oh, I made a fool of myself!" he cried. "I thought something preposterous—at least, I—I half thought it. Poor, dear little girl, no wonder she was hurt! If I were to see her again——" He broke off short, and walked to the window.

This "half-thinking," this waiting on "ifs," irritated his mother, but she curbed her irritation.

"I do not fancy we are in the least likely to see her again; she has vanished out of our sphere as sud-

denly as she appeared in it," she said with an accent of finality. After that, she would talk no more of Babette, but yawned delicately when the subject was introduced. She had done her part; she knew better than to overdo it. Was Frank going to find the girl or no? She asked no question, but she knew where he had gone when, at last, he went.

\* \* \* \* \*

Babette had a row of pink and purple hyacinths in the window; Jethro Cole had brought them to her in lieu of the promised sweets. She sat close to them, within reach of whiffs of fragrance, and her needle flew fast, and while she sewed she hummed a French song under her breath. Spring was in these back streets and alleys as well as everywhere else all over England. Fortunately she is no respecter of persons. In the open country the trees were bursting and burgeoning, and the thrushes calling to each other; in the parks and gardens the daffodils were nodding in brave array, and the tulips lifting up their polished chalices to the sun; but in back courts and tenements, too, were signs of the yearly resurrection. In pots and pannikins, in boxes edged with oyster-shells, in mugs filled with mould, you saw green things growing. Sometimes they were rather smutty; sometimes they were rather sickly; but there they were—blessed proofs of that which pushes up in strange places, that laughs at graves and bids us take heart again, for never yet was grave dug deep enough to hold the Life Everlasting eternally prisoner.

Mary Anne was poorly, Babette was tired, and the situation bristled with difficulties, and yet she sang, for the spring was in her veins, too, and her courage was rising like the sap. She was not radically a coward, though there is no doubt that she has played a poorish part throughout this history, and of late it seemed as if her soul had tasted of some life-giving draught. "You aren't really bad, Babette—you are good, good, good," someone had once said to her—an absurd saying, clearly contradicted by all the facts of life, hardly

attended to at the time it was uttered, but curiously invigorating.

"What a silly person he must be who believes that," Babette said, shaking her head over the foolishness of it; but then she hummed again, and Mary Anne Tavey, listening to the sound, nodded to herself.

"Barbara ain't really so unhappy here; she's humming like a bee that has got a store of honey hid somewhere."

Poor old Mary Anne! She wasn't so unhappy, either. The cruel winter was over, and the workhouse spectre had vanished. When she was dead, Barbara Mary Anne would see to her funeral, and her love for the girl grew apace. It had in it the love she had given to Babette's mother, and perhaps also the love that she would have given to children of her own had she had any. It was clean, austere, self-sacrificing, like every other quality she possessed. In old days it had shown itself in service. Her hands had not fondled, but they had scrubbed and worked for the mother and child she had befriended; her lips had chidden oftener than kissed, but they had never let a disloyal word escape them. Now age began to mellow her; she softened somewhat; her ideas sprouted, as young leaves may sprout on gnarled old oak.

"What are you thinking about, Mary Anne?" Babette would ask sometimes, when the old woman sat whispering to herself.

"Of what's gone by," Mary Anne would say. "But I see it different now to what I did at the time—quite different."

Her crippled hand had perforce to let work slip from it, but little by little she ceased to worry over that. A few years ago, even a few months ago, there could have been no such relaxation of the tough fibres of her being; but here again age was touching her at last, and she let responsibility fall more and more on Babette, who, for her part, had slid her shoulders into harness again and made no complaints; indeed, Babette had embraced

Luxury as an entrancing and longed-for mistress rather than as a familiar companion, but she and Poverty were old acquaintance. She was neither inadequate nor inexperienced; besides, this was a very modified form of poverty. A well-to-do father in the background made all the difference, and Mr. Cole had pressed gold into her hand on leaving her.

"Tell me if you want more. You won't be with Miss Tavey long," he had said.

"You think I haven't the pluck to stay?" Babette asked him doubtfully.

"Oh no! Not at all! But *she* won't be here," he had answered. "A game old hen, but very nearly at the end of her run!"

"Oh, I hope not!" Babette had cried. "She shan't die if I can keep her!" And, to do her justice, she flung herself with ardour into that pathetic task.

Sometimes it must be owned she commented rather bitterly on the fuss that rich people make about nursing their sick relatives.

"They don't have to keep the room clean, and cook the meals, as well as look after the patient with their own hands. Their servants do all the cooking and washing; and yet they are quite worn out if they sit up for a night or two, or nurse someone through an attack of 'flue,' with all the rough work done for them! They are all so funny, and so lucky, and so ridiculously, blissfully unconscious of what uncommonly easy times they have compared to the rest of us; but then—with sudden remorse—but then, they have hearts that can be broken too; and, oh dear! I wish that I had never gone among them to break granddad's!"

For she thought of Sir Hubert as granddad still; to the end of her days, she could never think of him otherwise. She had played her part with such whole-hearted zeal that it had in a measure become true to herself. Babette always laid hold on life with eagerness. That probably was part of her charm. She was alive in every fibre!

The Irish family on the ground-floor loved her. Mike fought battles for her. Miss Tavey's customers all "continued the custom" to her. A young milkman fell hopelessly in love with her. Perhaps it was partly the coming of spring that made everyone so susceptible. Then one fine day a messenger came from the life she had left.

Frank Graham walked up the dingy street, glanced at the window with the row of pink and purple hyacinths and the coarse Nottingham lace curtains (that sign of respectable gentility), saw Babette sitting there sewing, and knocked at the door with a thumping heart, for he was tired as well as slightly nervous. He had disliked the grubby surroundings as heartily as Babette herself had disliked them. He was more sorry for her than he could say, and yet irritated by the hole in which she had planted herself, and he was uncertain of his reception, remembering too clearly for comfort the anger in which they had parted.

## CHAPTER VII

BABETTE herself opened the door, work in hand and with a smile that was as bright and friendly as ever. Frank need have had no doubts about his reception. Babette never bore malice, never sulked even for a day. She was not taken by surprise; she had seen him from her window and was prepared to greet him.

"How nice of you to come to see me!" said she. "But I wonder how you knew where to find me? Come upstairs to Miss Tavey's sitting-room. I am so very pleased to see you, for I am longing to hear how they all are."

She led the way upstairs eagerly. The tiny room that was kitchen and living-room in one was more comfortable than it had been a month or two previously. The armchair was back in its place; the Salvation Captain's table had a chintz cover with pink roses on it. No one would guess now how far the grim wolf had pushed his head and shoulders in at the door, or how near the owner of this highly respectable place had been to starvation.

"You must sit in Miss Tavey's armchair," said Babette, pushing it towards him, "while I go on with my sewing. You don't mind seeing me sew, do you? I must finish this blouse to-day. Miss Tavey is in bed in the next room, but I hope she will soon be better. Now tell me about everyone. I am hungry for news. But, first of all, tell me about Sir Hubert, please."

"I don't know how he is. I've not seen him. He had gone abroad before I got home. I believe he has been seedy. But I did not come to talk about the

Redstones : I came to talk about *you*. Oh, Babette, when I heard——”

“When you heard you were not at all surprised, I should think,” said Babette. “No, for I told you myself. You were the one person to whom I did tell the secret. It wasn’t at all a nice secret. Poor Frank! how shocked you were! And I don’t wonder.”

“I didn’t understand,” he said quickly. “When you said poor Mr. Rothenstein was not your father, I felt as if everything was turned upside down. All the long, happy summer days that you and I and he had spent together once in France seemed to rush past me, Babette. I couldn’t make it out. If he wasn’t your father, what was he? Well, of course, I know now he was your stepfather; and he really was like a father to you, you poor little thing! I think the better of him for that—I do indeed. I understand it all now, though I wish you had told me more at the time. If you had only told me more, I shouldn’t have gone away like that. But I have come back, Babette. Dear, dear little Babette, I have come back. Shall we not be friends again, just as we were before?”

He leant forward, looking at her with the soft, near-sighted hazel eyes, that held such depths of expression in them. “Put down that silly bit of work and look at me!” he cried.

Babette did not put down the work, but she looked at him quite frankly, and, meeting the look, his own ardent glance fell.

“But I am afraid we can’t do that,” she said. “No one can ever go back, after a storm and a change, and pick up what they left, and find it just as it was before. It is not possible, you know.”

“Are you so fickle?” he said reproachfully.

But she made no reply. He was a little injured then.

“You can fly on and forget, but I am not made so,” he said. “We were great friends during that summer in the forest, Babette. The next time I met you I found you sobbing—sobbing as if your poor little heart



would break—and I came a step nearer to you then. Then you came to England, and I was among the first to welcome you to the new life. You came out into the garden in Melbury Road early in the morning, before breakfast. It was breathlessly hot. You sat perched on the steps of the terrace; there were scarlet flowers on either side of you, and you laughed at the sparrows hopping round your feet. You told me how you had once lived in a basement where blackbeetles swarmed, and that you had played in disused rooms, and had pretended to entertain Queen Victoria. Have you forgotten that? You were angry about something, but you forgave very quickly. I was in love with you even then, Babette, though you did not know it.”

“Oh yes, but I did! of course I knew it!” cried Babette. “Dear me, Frank! the stupidest girl would have known it then. I was very angry with you for a minute or two, because you blamed my stepfather for letting mammy and me live in a basement. Since it was before he married, he certainly couldn’t help that. Then I realized that it was not your fault that you were unjust to him. It was because you did not know, and I as nearly as possible told you the whole story then. I was always longing to tell someone; but I’ve found out something since those days. I’ve found out that you *can* only tell the truth to the right person. If you tell it to the wrong person, it is not the truth any longer: it turns into something else. It turned into something else when I tried to tell it to you.”

“Oh, you are still angry! Yet I think it was hardly my fault that I did not know the facts by instinct,” said he.

He was annoyed, and yet the old fascination was taking hold of him. He had meant to forgive Babette, but she wouldn’t be forgiven. He had meant to step in and rescue her, as his mother had suggested, but how could he do that when she told him that he was the “wrong person”?

“I’m not angry now, but I was—I was furious!”

said Babette. "Do you know, I believe that nothing makes one feel so wicked and so bitter and so—so horribly indignant as to find that someone in whom one trusted can take a confession the wrong way. But that's all over and gone, like last year's storms. Oh, Frank, do you remember the storms at Compiègne, and how fast we ran?"

She dimpled at the recollection, but he refused to smile.

"Oh yes, I remember," he said. "For, unfortunately for me, I cannot forget as easily as you can."

She was so pretty still, though thinner than she used to be, less elfish somehow, and more womanly. If she had encouraged him, he would have overlooked everything, and proposed to little Babette, after all.

"I don't forget. I never forget Compiègne," said Babette.

She was serious again; the mockery had gone out of her eyes.

"I never forget my stepfather's grave there. I never really forget the night he died. I think very often of the time when he and I and you wandered through the forest together. It was a very merry time, wasn't it? though there were dreadful money worries that you never guessed at, and that I wouldn't have let you guess for all the world. I think it was knowing you that first made me long so to be rich. When I grabbed at the kind of life that didn't belong to me, it made it all the nicer that you were there to welcome me. No, that was not your fault. It was mine—altogether mine. I know that I have been horrid."

"Dear little girl!" he cried, and tried to take her hand, but the flying needle pricked his fingers, and he withdrew them hastily.

"It is possible for someone who is entirely honest to be friends with someone who has been perfectly horrid," said Babette, and as she spoke she blushed. "But I think the someone has to be very good indeed for that—good enough to see to the bottom of all sorts of

things. You couldn't be that sort of deliverer, Frank I've only met one person who could. That isn't your fault either."

"Oh!" said Frank blankly. "Do you mean that you are going to be married to someone else?"

"Never!" said she. "There it is, you see. I'm never going to be married at all. That will be dull, won't it? Such an awful fate to have brought on oneself."

She looked up at his dismayed face with a laugh. She had saved him a rejection, anyhow. When he got home he would be glad that he had not risked a proposal. She knew that very well. Yet she felt kindly to him, too; she was sorry from her heart that he was ill and out of spirits. She looked back on the misery and bitterness that had swept over her once, as one in a newly-sprouting field may look back on the simoom in the desert.

"It was kind and generous of you to come like this. Thank you so very much for coming," said she. "If I felt bitter once because you thought I was even worse than I am, that is done away with by your visit to-day. But now I wish you would go, please. There, you see, I feel we are such friends again that I can say, 'Please go.' I can't work so fast when I am talking. I always stop my needle to look at whoever I am talking to. See, I am going to hold the door open while you go down the stairs, for they are very badly lit, and you might tumble over an O'Grady baby."

She held out her hand to him with a very sweet smile, and Frank as he took it felt abashed. In his heart he knew that she hadn't much to thank him for.

"And after all," he said to himself, "I believe she is good."

That was the ultimate impression. He had never quite trusted Babette before, not even when he was most fascinated by her. Now he did; but now, also, he knew that she would never marry him.

He went down the stairs with Babette's "thank you"

still ringing in his ears, and as he reached the foot of them he collided with someone in the narrow entry.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said, in a somewhat disgusted tone, as he recognized the insignificant figure of Siegfried Durnham.

A latent antagonism that had grown between the two seemed suddenly to wax strong. Siegfried took a long look at Frank and smiled broadly.

"What the devil do you mean by grinning at me like that?" Frank cried.

He was rubbed the wrong way, ready to quarrel with anyone just then.

"Did I grin? I suppose it must have been because I was pleased," said Siegfried.

He pushed past Frank and went up the stairs, whistling under his breath very softly.

"I won't go so far as to say *I'm* the one—yet, but at least I can jolly well see he isn't in it," he said to himself.

Babette was still holding the door open to light the stairs, and she, too, cried, "Oh, it's you!" when she saw him.

"But I told you not to come here, Siegfried. I don't want you. I haven't time for visitors—I really haven't," she cried hastily.

"I shan't stay long," said Siegfried. "Please let me in, Babette, because I don't know that you would like me to say what I have come to say in the passage. I don't mind who hears, but you might. Oh well, then, if you won't invite me inside, I have just come to tell you——"

Babette opened the door.

"Come in. Mrs. O'Grady is listening to you at the bottom of the stairs. But I am very busy," said she.

Siegfried followed her into the tiny room and shut the door. There was a mixture of tenderness and amusement in his expression as she took up her work again and bent her head over it.

"I am off to-morrow," he said. "I wish to mention

that when I come back—if I come back—I shall ask you to marry me, Babette.”

Babette's head bent lower over her work.

“No, no! I've said no before. You know I can't listen. You said you wouldn't spoil everything. You said you wouldn't bother any more.”

“I am not bothering. I am not asking anything of you,” said Siegfried. “I leave you quite free and that. Only I thought I'd just tell you that if I come home I shall want you to marry me. That is just stating a fact. It's always as well to be sure of our facts. We shall be away for some years possibly. You need not feel in the least hurried or fussed, you see.”

“If I am quite free, as I certainly am, I may be married to someone else by the time your ship comes home,” said Babette.

He took no notice of that, and in the silence her needle flew quicker.

“Well, I *may*,” she repeated defiantly, “for, you see, though I am working hard and living poorly now, yet my father is really rich. There are people in the world who don't care what else one is or isn't so long as there is money. I don't suppose *you'd* understand that, but there are, I assure you.”

“Very likely there are,” said Siegfried. “But those poor Johnnies have nothing whatever to do with us.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Babette. Her needle had broken off short and run into her finger. A crimson stain marked the silk. She jumped up quickly.

“I must soak this in cold water at once.”

Siegfried caught her hand, needle, and blouse as she would have passed him. The tenderness in his face deepened.

“Have nothing whatever to do with us,” he repeated. “You don't want a silly ass who has an eye to your father's money. I am not at all afraid of him, if there is such a one. Of course, I know that there are lots of fellows who might want you for yourself, Babette, and that I'm not much to look at and that; but, then,

that isn't what counts, either—not with *you*, you know. Not in the long-run. Now, don't worry about that bit of sewing. I will buy it, please, stain and all. How much does it cost?"

Babette laughed hysterically. She was overwrought and very tired.

"Two and elevenpence three farthings," she said. "How useful a Japanese silk blouse will be to you, Siegfried! Shall you wear it when you get to the South Pole?"

"No, but I've got a use for it in my mind," said he. "It's all right; I know what I shall do with it."

His hand closed on it.

"But it's not finished! I wish you wouldn't!" cried Babette. "Oh, Siegfried, I am in deadly earnest! I am not playing. I really ought to get that blouse done before the light is gone."

There was a little choke in her voice, and he looked hard at her.

"You have got much too thin. You are not really living on what you earn, are you?" he asked.

"No. I am a bit of a fraud, as usual, for *I* live on what my father gave me when I persuaded him to leave me here. But Mary Anne won't take his money, and I am doing her work while she is laid up. She lives on what I can earn. I swear truly to her that Mr. Cole has nothing to do with that. Pride is costly," Babette said, with her queer little smile. "But I shall pay for Mary Anne's if I can."

Siegfried produced three shillings.

"Here is the price," he said. "It is too cheap, I think. I say, couldn't you wrap it up in a bit of paper? No? Oh, very well, I'll take it as it is, then."

"But I don't want you to take it. I don't want you to take anything away with you. I haven't given you anything," said Babette.

"Come, now. You pay for Miss Tavey's pride, and I pay for yours," said Siegfried.

"No; it isn't pride. What have I to be proud of?"

It is that I won't do your people any more harm, and that the game is at an end, and that I repent ever having played it," she cried.

"Is that all?" he said.

He fought hard with a sudden overmastering desire to take his little love in his arms. Though Babette really knew a good deal more about him than most people knew, she did not know that.

He looked away from her. Already salt seas, and a white and barren land, and long, long nights and vast expanses seemed to lie between him and her. He would come back his own master, dependent on no one—but he would leave her free. Besides, she was right: those dead lies must be buried.

"But I wish you luck," she cried. "Wherever you are, I wish you happiness and the best luck in the world always."

"I've *got* it, I believe," said he. "I am not at all afraid. Good-bye, Babette." And so he went, not touching her, not even shaking hands, but carrying the ridiculous flimsy silk blouse with him.

What was he "not afraid" of? Of icebergs and salt water? of change and forgetfulness? He had asked no promise of her, but he was "not in the least afraid," and that, as he would have said, was a mere "statement of fact."

## CHAPTER VIII

DIRECTLY after the door shut on Siegfried, Babette went into the back room, where Mary Anne was sitting up in bed coughing badly.

"I'm getting hard of hearing," Mary Anne said between her coughs, "but I know you've 'ad gentlemen visitors, Barbara, and I don't 'alf like 'em."

"I'll tell you all about them, Mary Anne," Babette said; "that, is, I'll tell you all about them if you'll eat your food like a good old dear."

The old woman had tea and toast and a bit of fried fish. She refused to touch "slops," and had the profoundest contempt for the doctor's orders. Babette coaxed her to eat a mouthful or two, but she groaned and coughed and shook her head over the food.

"It's wasteful to give such things to them as doesn't want them," said she. "If you ain't hungry, let it alone, says I, for there's plenty as is."

"But you've had nothing but tea all day; you can't live on nothing," said Babette.

"When you can't live it's time for you to die. I don't hold with pampering," said Mary Anne. "There! Take them things away, my dear, and get your own tea in the parlour"—Mary Anne always called her room the parlour—"and then come back and show me Mrs. Higgins's blouse. You *'ave* a pretty genteel taste in blouses, I will say for you."

Babette presently returned empty-handed.

"An accident happened to that blouse. I ran a needle into my finger, and it bled and made a mark,"



she said. Then, seeing Mary Anne's dismay, she added hastily: "But you needn't be distressed. I've got the money for it, and I can run up another for Mrs. Higgins in no time."

"But if you 'ad an accident over it and 'ave got to make another, where did you get the money?" Mary Anne demanded sharply.

"Somebody took a fancy to it and bought it just as it was. People do take such queer fancies sometimes," said Babette.

"But it was an order! You had no business to let it go like that," said Mary Anne. "That's you all over, Barbara Mary Anne. You're uncommon persuasive, but you've not a 'apporth of principle, or if you 'ave you don't stand by it. You've not acted fair by Mrs. Higgins, letting her pattern go to another customer. She'll say (and truly) that if she employs a dressmaker she expects her own style. You can see them thin silk blouses at Packings' cut out by the 'undred and alike to a stitch, but what *we* do is special, and sixpence dearer accordingly. You've not dealt fair, and you may be sure you'll be found out. The next thing will be Mrs. Higgins will meet the lady as you've sold her blouse to with it on, and where will you be then?"

Babette sat down by the bed to laugh.

"Mrs. Higgins will never meet that blouse, Mary Anne. I promise you that," said she. "My cousin Siegfried bought it to take to the South Pole with him. There, now you know!"

But Mary Anne was unappeased.

"Your cousin Siegfried! But he ain't your cousin no more than I am. You've played at that deceivin' game till you've got to 'alf believe in it yourself, Barbara. Tricks comes too easy to you, and when you come to die where will you be, my dear? Kind you are, and grateful, and tender-'earted—I'll say all that for you—but not a scrap of religion nor one single fixed principle to your name. It worries me as I lie here to think what will become of you."

Her small red-rimmed eyes were full of yearning and painful anxiety. Love always touched Babette.

"Dear old friend, please don't worry about me. I'll try to be good—I really will," said she.

But Mary Anne shook her head despondingly.

"I don't know, I'm sure, whether you'll succeed," groaned she. "You're too set on what's soft and pretty, and you are carried away by fancies, and you're fond of men; and that ain't a safe make of woman, to my mind."

"Well, Mary Anne, I didn't make myself, anyhow. I think if I don't succeed that ought to be taken into consideration," said Babette ruefully.

As the weeks went by she was often a little rueful, and her gay spirit sometimes waxed faint. The weather turned muggy, her bedroom was close at night, and her colour faded. She grew thinner, and slept over-lightly of nights, waking often with the startled sensation that an invader was creeping up the narrow stairs. Not that she was afraid of thieves. There was little to steal, and the O'Gradys, though shiftless, were honest enough. No; the terror was of a different kind, and she did not care to put a name to it. She only felt that something alien and cold was on the prowl, something against which no love can hold the door.

Though she possessed in large measure the resilience and vitality of youth, yet the horror of death caught her at times, for the finding of her stepfather stark and cold on his bed in the French boarding-house had given her a shock that she had not quite got over. She was lonely too; though she loved old Mary Anne, she was very lonely. She suffered from contact with squalor and coarseness; she missed those refinements of living which she had embraced with such conscious joy. Mary Anne had a high standard of cleanliness, but cleanliness in poor surroundings means a daily and heroic fight waged with insufficient weapons. Mary Anne was a tough old warrior, who had taken a certain stern satisfaction in the very hardness of the battle,

but Babette was no fighter; she was born to charm rather than to contend. Above all, she poignantly missed the society of Sir Hubert. She had been accustomed for many years to be the companion of a man of education, and her heart ached whenever she thought of him; and beyond and beneath all these emotions was something else, and something she did not face or understand, but that caused her to laugh in her sleep now and again, that inspired her with courage, but that also made her pillow wet with tears, which were not shed for remorse, nor for weariness of the conditions of life, nor for creeping terror of the invader, but some other cause altogether.

Siegfried Durnham was on the high seas, and Mary Anne was growing weaker. One night Babette jumped up, awakened by one of those pangs of fright that too often possessed her in the small hours. It was one o'clock, and she slid out of bed, lit a candle, and went into Mary Anne's room. To her relief, Mary Anne was sitting bolt upright, her fingers clasped round her knees, her lips moving. Her small figure, with the thin bowed shoulders and sunken chest, seemed pathetic to the girl, who ran across the room and laid her warm young hands on the old gnarled ones.

"I wish you wouldn't sit up," she scolded tenderly, "but if you must, I'll fetch the old plaid shawl to wrap round you."

"Law, Barbara! There's no need for you to come fussin' in so," said Mary Anne. "My breath catches when I lay down flat, and the night is long, but I don't want that old shawl. I'm thirsty, though; I'd dearly like a drink."

"I'll boil some water over my spirit-lamp, and you shall have a cup of hot tea," said Babette.

The little blue flame of the lamp leapt cheerfully. Babette smiled as she watched it, and nodded to it as if it were alive.

"It's such a tried old friend," she said. "It has been in so many places with me. Mammy's man and I found

it the comfort of our lives in France. There! the water will soon boil. You should call me when you want anything. Why do you wear yourself out by talking to yourself?"

"I wasn't talking to myself," said Mary Anne; "I was speaking to God, Barbara. There've been times when I was terrible afraid He would allow me to go to the Union, and I couldn't have rested in my grave if it was a pauper funeral; but there! that isn't to be, and the least I can do is to thank Him. It come over me to-night that I never have thanked Him properly. Yes, it come over me that I was behaving like a whining beggar of the sort I most despise. I never was one to hold with asking alms, and yet I begged hard of the Almighty, and when I'd got what I asked, that was all there was to it. It was partly having you with me made me think about that, for I will say for you, Barbara, that you're quick to give anyone their due of thanks. I've been thinking a lot about you. What are you going to do when I'm dead? I shan't last much longer."

"Oh, I'm sure I don't know. Your tea is ready, Mary Anne, but I wish I had some milk," said Babette.

The old woman drank thirstily. "It's a great luxury, tea is," she said. "And so it is to have someone to get up and make it. It seems almost a sinful luxury; but there, I *am* old, so perhaps it needn't be begrudged. That's another thing as I've come to think lately. It may be I've took hold of life too grudgingly, and as you takes, so you holds. But there! one can't be everything, and I've been clean, and I've been honest, and I've been independent, and that's more than many of the pleasanter ones can say."

"It is indeed," Babette agreed warmly; "that's what my father says of you, too."

"I never did hold with him," said Mary Anne, "not in the old days. A drunken lout, as did your pore mother no good! But still, I've known many worse,

and it seems there's bound to be different kinds in the world."

She sat blinking with tired eyes, as if some new light were dazzling them.

"Are you intendin' to marry either of them gentlemen who came here to see you the day when you ought to have finished Mrs. Higgins's blouse?" she asked.

Babette shook her head.

"No, Mary Anne. I'm not intending to marry anyone."

"Then if you ain't meanin' marriage, or if *they* ain't, you just go to your father, so soon as the breath's out of my body," said Mary Anne earnestly. "Don't you stay here alone, for alone you can't be, you're not the sort; nor don't you play any more tricks, but just you go to him. A man, no doubt, he is, and therefore liable to unreason, and to untidy ways, and to bad language; but you're one as likes men, as your mother did before you. You go to Jethro Cole, my dear; for all he deserted you once, he wants you now."

"Does he? No; I think he gets on very well without me," said Babette.

"Does it stick in your throat that he treated you and your mother bad once?" the old woman asked; but Babette shook her head.

"No, it doesn't now, not since I've met him again," she avowed. "At one time I felt very angry whenever I thought about my father, but the creature I hated wasn't the real man at all. Since I've seen him I begin to understand him."

"Understanding don't make any difference as to an action being sinful or not sinful," said Mary Anne firmly. "And, as for me, I can't never look at Jethro Cole without thinking, 'You hit Barbara, and she's in her grave, and *that's why* she's in her grave.' And yet I don't wish 'im evil, my dear. I don't any more, and I'm thankful you ain't made like me. It's merciful for you that you can put what is past behind you

and go on. He can do that, too. He don't bear malice. Though I haven't liked your father, I can see now as there's some quality in 'im that's not poor quality. I can see that, through havin' got some affection for you. 'Aving affection does show one things."

"Well, I should just think it does," said Babette.

"I've always been one as believed in keeping oneself to oneself, and doing one's duty, and being independent, but families is the ordinance of providence, and is meant to hang together. It's right your father should give you your place in 'is 'house now he's up in the market, and if he does that, it's right you should give him his due, too."

"I have nothing to give," said Babette.

"You've what some might call takin' ways," said Mary Anne. "And you've a deal of understandin' of the inside meanings of men and women, and you're merry over troubles, and you're pleasant spoken. Mind, I don't say those are the kind of virtues as will let you into heaven, Barbara, but they do go to make a pleasin' 'ome on earth. You take 'em to Jethro Cole, and you'll find he won't despise 'em, and when I'm well buried you may tell 'im I told you to trust 'im. Surprised 'e'll be, for I was dead set against him once, but there! when it comes to dying one sees different."

"Don't! I don't want you to die," cried Babette. She got on to the bed and wound her arms round the old woman as if to hold her tight.

"I'm fond of you, dear old Mary Anne. Don't die!"

Mary made as though to push her away.

"You're very foolish, Barbara Mary Anne," said she. "And it's about time I went, for there's no sense in staying above ground after one's work's done, but I shan't die to-night. You get nervous, that's what it is, and that comes from your not havin' a fixed principle to rest your mind on. You go back to your bed now. Your cup of tea and the sight of you 'as refreshed me,

my dear (though I could wish you was a better girl), and I am as comfortable as the Queen."

Babette, reassured, left her, and in the morning Mary Anne seemed rather easier and very cheerful. Yet from that night there was a change in the old woman which it would have been difficult to define, but which Babette felt. It was not so much physical as spiritual. It was as if the brave old soul had made her peace, had put her affairs in order, and had given up the struggle. She offered no more advice, but took it for granted that Babette would follow her injunction. She ceased to deplore the girl's lack of principle, and the only work she attempted to do was the darning of a hole in a fine linen sheet that had been saved when everything else had been sold.

"Mind, this is to be put over me when I'm dead," she told Babette, as she lovingly set the last stitch in it. "My mother slept on it on her marriage night, and it was laid over her corpse at the end. There's not another like it in this street; but, there! I belong to a very different class of family to those about here. I'm not proud of that, for pride's sinful, but it's only fitting that the difference should be properly marked. So don't you forget that this sheet lies over me on the bed, Barbara, and put it so as the worked monogram shows."

"I won't forget," Babette promised.

"And you may keep the sheet for your own property afterwards, for I've left it to you," said Mary Anne. "It's the finest linen, and I couldn't part with it not when things were at the worst, I couldn't! It's all I've got to leave you, my dear, and I will say you've a deal more than repaid me for anything I did for you when you was a child. It's strange that what counts at the end are things one didn't set so much store by at the time, and what one regrets isn't so much one's sins as just not 'avin' always been kind enough."

"Dear old Mary Anne! You've been kindness itself to me," said Babette.

"One does according to one's lights, and now I'm gettin' tired," said Mary Anne. "I ain't sorry now to think I shall sleep in my coffin soon, for when all's said and done, I 'ave worked terrible 'ard all my life, and I feel I've 'ad enough, and I've earned a rest. I shall be easy now, knowing you'll follow my funeral and see to its being in order. I'd have turned in my grave if it was a pauper one. But about the sheet; perhaps you'll sleep on it for your weddin', Barbara, for, though I never was wed, nor wished to be, seein' the untidy ways of men, yet you're different; and wed or no, I'd like you to have it over you when you lies dead."

Babette suppressed a shudder, for her sympathy was stronger than her nerves.

"Thank you, Mary Anne. I'll remember that, too," she said.

The old woman looked very pleased.

"Well, now! I was 'alf afraid you wouldn't care about it," she said. "I've been longing to speak to you about it, times and again, but I was 'alf afraid, for I can see you do 'ate to think of death, my dear. But there's no one any the worse for an old woman's blessing, and that will lie on you, Barbara Mary Anne, whether it's my sheet you've got or no."

Babette swallowed a lump in her throat. She was glad she had accepted the gift.

A week later Mary Anne Tavey died. The weather had changed suddenly, and become as cold as if it were mid-winter. There was a frost at night that nipped all the tender young buds, and all one week a bitter north-east wind blew. It seemed to shake old people 'off the tree of life, as if they were last year's withered leaves. There was no tender parting at the end. Mary Anne passed away in her sleep, having been scarcely conscious all day. That conversation about



the sheet was the last real talk Babette had with her.

Jethro Cole stood by his daughter's side when Mary Anne drew her last breath.

"Poor old soul, poor old soul!" said Jethro. "She couldn't abide me, but I declare I'm sorry she's dead."

## CHAPTER IX

BABETTE and Jethro Cole stood together at Mary Anne Tavey's grave in the vast London cemetery. All the O'Gradys had followed the coffin; even the last baby was brought in Mrs. O'Grady's arms. They greatly enjoyed the drive in the "mourning coach," and they all wore crape and wept copiously. Other neighbours, too, came to the funeral.

"We may as well do it handsomely while we're about it," Jethro had said, and he had paid all expenses.

Babette was hysterically conscious of the ghastly and yet comical incongruity of the circumstances. Mary Anne had heartily despised the O'Gradys, and here they were all behaving as if they were her nearest and dearest relatives; she had grudged owing Jethro Cole so much as a passing civility, and here he was spending only too lavishly on her burial! The sight of Mrs. O'Grady mopping her eyes with a black-bordered handkerchief effectually prevented her own tears from falling, and yet, perhaps after all, Mary Anne might have been gratified by the display!

"For the dear old thing *did* love a funeral," Babette reflected.

It rained hard, and though it was the last day of April, the rain was mixed with sleet. Babette's shoes stuck in the clayey soil. The smell of damp black clothes made her feel sick. She tried to attend to the words that were being said.

"... he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay."

It was true; shadows were always changing their shapes!

Jethro cast a rather anxious glance at the very white little face at his side. He unfurled his umbrella, and pulled his daughter's hand through his arm as the service concluded.

"You're coming home with me now," said he. "That job's done! and I must say you were good to that old woman, Barbara. Lord! I should like to believe you'd be as sorry about me one day. Perhaps you will, eh? There's no knowing."

Babette tried to respond, but she felt dizzy, and her steps had a curious inclination to wander crookedly. She was really glad of his arm to steady her. All the day before she had eaten little and thought much. Birth and death, love and indifference, the fight of the valiant, the yielding of the coward—all the huge clashing forces that go to the making of the wonder we call life had held her awestruck and serious; but to-day she could not think at all. She ached all over; her head ached, her eyes ached, and her heart ached.

"I hate graveyards," said she. "But Mary Anne would not like me to stay away, and it would be a shame if not one who loved her were at her funeral."

"To be sure! A respectful enemy like me is all very well, but a loving friend like you is better," said Jethro Cole sympathetically. "One *would* like to know what's become of her now, eh? But there! you're not in tune for questions and guesses."

He took her in a cab to the red-brick house by the Tylerine factory, and looked at her eagerly to see what sort of impression her new home made on her on their arrival.

"It's better than Mary Anne Tavey's, but, of course, it's not like what Sir Hubert gave you, because I haven't had the time to consider much about trimmings as yet," said he. "It will be nicer when there's a young female about to turn it into a pretty home."

The great factory, the hum of machinery in her ears,

the curious odour of Tylerine in her nostrils, were repugnant to Babette, but she was too weary to be acutely conscious of her surroundings. At any other time Jethro Cole's words would at once have roused her sympathy and struck a responsive chord, for the making of a pretty home was a strong natural instinct in her, but now his voice seemed to reach her through a dull fog. She was dimly aware that she tried to say something to him in reply, but that she pronounced the words thickly. She tried to laugh at herself, but that was a failure, too. She clung to him because the ground seemed to heave and sway; then to his bewilderment and dismay her grasp relaxed, and she slid down at his feet in a dead faint.

He stooped and lifted her in his arms, sending the cabman for a doctor. He was horribly frightened, and shouted for Mrs. Higgins lustily, as he carried her over the threshold of the home that was to be his and hers.

"I suppose the whole set-out was more than she could stand; but how was I to know? I ain't used to em," he said.

The "them" referred to daughters, not to funerals, and he felt helpless and dismayed. The doctor, when he came, did not lighten his anxiety. In his opinion it was a case of nervous breakdown, aggravated by over-work and under-feeding. What were women made of nowadays that they should go to pieces so easily?

"Why, my wife did three times the amount of work that this little thing undertook for Miss Tavey, and as for under-feeding, that's nonsense. She wasn't under-fed, or if she was she had only herself to thank for it," he said.

The next day found Babette very much worse and with a high temperature, and on the day following there was no doubt that she was very ill indeed. Her father was filled with angry compunction. He felt as if her illness were somehow his fault, though there was no one to blame him—at least, no one outside himself. He wished there were, for the accusation of the accuser.

who stands within the court of the soul is so terribly unanswerable! One may say what one likes to him, one may reason, or conciliate, or bluster, but that wordless accusation never wavers. Then, if someone else rails or reproaches, that is such a relief! for the outsider is less unimpeachable. That is why most of us become quarrelsome when our consciences make themselves unbearably unpleasant.

Jethro Cole found relief in picking a quarrel with the doctor, but it was only a momentary relief after all. He said he supposed that doctors must say something when they couldn't understand what it was all about, and that no doubt "nervous breakdown" and brain fever did as well as anything else to talk big about. That was rude, but the doctor, seeing the man's anxiety, shrugged his shoulders and let it pass. Then Jethro opined that it didn't pay to let rich patients get well too soon, which was so unpardonably offensive that the doctor threw up the case and walked out of his house in disgust, and then the accusation of the accuser made itself heard more painfully than ever.

"You killed your wife," it said; "you deserted your child. If she dies you will be answerable for the lives of both. You had far better never have been born."

\* \* \* \* \*

Two nurses had been sent in, and Jethro only went into the sick-room now and again. He was jealous of the women, and had a wild desire to pack them off, and nurse his daughter himself, as he had nursed Tyler. The new doctor would not allow that. He said trained nursing was a necessity, and the suggestion madly impossible. He bid the master of the house "pull himself together" and "go about his business." When Dr. Smith got to know the father, he did not wonder that the daughter's nervous system had been thrown off its equilibrium. The man had no placid temperament; he was capable of revulsions of feeling that were sudden and tremendous.

"All right. I'll hold tight on to myself till she's dead," Jethro said grimly. "If she dies, I'll drink till I'm blind, and there'll be an end of it."

And that was a defiance, not to the doctor, but to the accuser, who cares not at all for threats, but only says the same thing again till remorse bites into the soul and drives it to despair, unless by chance—but no, we will rather say by design—mercy meets it.

Jethro usually went to the door of Babette's room the first thing in the morning, before he went to the works, and again when he came in at the end of the working day, but there came an afternoon when he could not hold out for the twelve hours, and went back to see how she was about five in the afternoon.

He found Babette sitting up in bed, chattering very fast and very excitedly. Her pretty soft hair had been cut off, and it was pushed back from her forehead, showing that ugly scar of a wound healed long ago. Her cheeks had bright spots of colour on the cheek-bones; her eyes glanced brightly about her, but with a curious unsettled look in them. Her small hands moved nervously, and played with the sheet.

Jethro caught his breath as he looked at her—she reminded him so of the little girl he had left long ago.

"She won't know you; she doesn't know anyone. Please don't come in," the nurse said.

Jethro pushed her aside and stood by the bed. He could not believe that she would not know him.

"How are you, my little girl?" said he.

And at that Babette stopped chattering. Her uncertain, wandering gaze fixed itself on him for a second, then changed to terror, and she shrieked, "Go away! go away!" in shrill, frightened accents.

"You *must* go, sir; you make her worse," the nurse said.

She was intrepid as well as indignant. She fairly took hold of the man and shoved him out of the door, and turned the key in the lock.

Jethro laughed miserably—history seemed repeating

itself with strangely mocking exactitude—as he stumbled down the stairs and out of the house. One or two of his men, going out to their tea, nudged each other, thinking he was drunk, and so he was—but only with misery. He was sure at that moment that Babette would die, and it seemed to him that the power that governs life and death was more than unforgiving—it was absolutely vindictive. There was a sort of neat retribution about the situation that made him shout again with most unmirthful laughter. Well, well, he was paid out. There would soon be nothing left worth living for, for, after all, what did he care about lonely riches? “As a matter of fact, I don’t care a twopenny d——n for any of it, after all,” he said, and snapped his fingers at his works.

Then something in him said :

“But what of Tyler, who fought so hard for you?” And Jethro Cole swore aloud at Tyler.

“If Barbara dies, d——n Tyler for saving me,” he said aloud, but to curse Tyler felt like cursing God.

Someone, a woman, held out a hand to him, and interrupted the tumultuous turmoil of feeling.

“It is Mr. Cole, isn’t it? I was on my way to inquire. Do please tell me how your daughter is?”

Jethro Cole stood still and stared as if he had not the faintest idea who it was that spoke. Then he rubbed the back of his hand across his eyes.

“Why, it’s the schoolmistress,” he said. “Oh, well, thank you for asking. My daughter is dying, you know. That’s how she is—dying! They don’t seem able to prevent it.”

Now, the last time Miss Dupins had met Jethro Cole she had been filled with righteous indignation at his behaviour to his child and to her dear old friend, Sir Hubert, but since then his parting rebuke had gone home to her. She had realized that his words rang true. Whatever else she might have learned, she had not known how to stand by a friend in a hole when the hole was of his own making. Contrition had brought

her here to-day, but now she forgot herself, forgot even the contrition.

"Oh, I am sorry, I'm sorry!" she cried. "But Babette is so young, such a little young thing, I don't believe anyone can possibly know that she is dying. Why, at her age there must be hope till she is actually gone. Surely the doctor does not tell you to despair?"

"Oh, he don't amount to much, and I hate doctors. They grow fat on other folks' leanness," said Jethro violently. "They're all alike. Their fee is what they look to, with the exception of Tyler, and he's dead. If Tyler had been alive, you may bet he'd have cured Barbara by now."

Miss Dupins looked at him with concern. His deep-set eyes, that she had so often seen twinkle with humour, were red-rimmed and fierce. His grizzled beard was unkempt. He was in a shockingly bad temper, being one of the people whom anxiety makes irritable. She, too, had doubts as to his being quite sober, and, with that quickness at reading other people's thoughts which always characterized him he read her suspicion.

"Oh no, I'm not drunk," said he, "not yet. There'll be time for that afterwards. Not that I can do anything, though I'm sober as a judge. I'm the last can do anything, for she's scared of me. Did you ever notice the scar on her forehead? That was my doing. "Go away, go away!" she screams, and the woman turned me out. That was what happened before, but it was Mary Anne who turned me out then, and I went to the devil! She sat up in bed just the same, but her head was bound up with a bandage. It was my doing then, and it's my doing now. First my wife, and then my child. You didn't know I had killed my wife, did you? but I did. I ought to have been hanged."

"Nonsense!" said Miss Dupins firmly. "Now you are talking great nonsense, you know."

All at once she felt as if this great grizzled elderly man were but a ridiculous child. Not nearly so grown



up, and far more foolish, than herself, a person who needed to be taken care of just then, whom one must on no account leave alone, with black misery on one side and an accusing conscience on the other. It would be sheer cruelty to go on. She could no more do it than she could have left a frightened little boy alone in a dark place.

"I came to Wandsworth by the Underground Railway," she said in her clear, even tones. "It was crowded and most disagreeable. I am tired and thirsty. Will you not offer me a cup of tea, Mr. Cole? I think that it is quite your turn to offer tea."

He still stared at her with rather a dazed air.

"Yes—yes, it's my turn," he said; "but I'm not in tune for tea-parties nor for ladies."

"Of course not," said Miss Dupins. "But this is not a case of tea-parties and ladies. It is just a tired woman, and a friend."

"I haven't got any friends—not since Tyler's dead and Barbara dying," said he. "I counted on her taking to me in the end. She seemed half ready to already. A funny little slip, but I'd rather taken to her. But you were right, you know. A cruel coward, you said I was, and that there'd be a heavy price to pay. Tyler pitched into me, too, sometimes, but that was different. *You* were on another bit of ground, you know—superior altogether—but you were right, quite right, as it turns out. There *is* the devil to pay, and after he's paid I shall go bankrupt. There'll be no more playing at friends with your sort after that."

"I was wrong," said Miss Dupins. "And so are you. You are not going bankrupt, and you're not a cruel coward."

She spoke with energy and concentrated force. At last her words seemed to reach him. He stood still, and then turned round suddenly.

"Did you say you wanted tea? But there aren't any tea-shops about here," said he. "You'd better come to my house. Mrs. Higgins shall bring you some."

He led the way, walking quickly. Miss Dupins followed him into the square, red-brick house adjoining the works. They went into a dining-room that smelt of new paint and upholstery.

"When I knew she was coming," he explained, pointing with his thumb in the direction of the floor above, "I had this furnished *en suite*. But I don't think it's right. It don't look as nice as your dining-room, though larger. For myself, I'd been living in two rooms, but I meant to let Barbara have a hand in furnishing the whole house later on. She's got a pretty taste. They've educated her up to that. Sit down, please."

He went to the door and shouted down the passage for tea. Mrs. Higgins kept them waiting some time, and when she did make her appearance she eyed her master's guest with sharp curiosity and some suspicion. The tea, when it came, was cold and bitter. The master swore at it, and then apologized.

"It was to have been all put on a new footing when my daughter came to me," he said. "I meant her to see to the house. I can't cope with women. I never could. Either I'm too soft, or else I'm too rough with them. Mrs. Higgins makes me very uncomfortable, taking it all round, but she's had a hard life."

He poured out the tea for his guest, and then sat thoughtfully stirring the spoon round and round—that old trick which she had always longed to correct.

"I'd all kinds of plans," he said. "That old chap that she is so fond of—that pretence grandfather of hers—he wouldn't have done more for her than I meant to do. But we've killed the little thing between us. She took it hard that he couldn't forgive her. I saw her blench. You see, it was like this. I drove her into deceivin' ways, and he couldn't forgive her. We're a nice couple of old men, aren't we? We do a lot of killing one way and another. D'you know what that poetical fellow said about it? It's quite true."

He began to hum Herrick's song.

"Hush, hush! you might disturb Babette," said Miss Dupins.

She was full of the deepest sympathy for him, though her voice sounded cold and restrained. Jethro Cole recognized the sympathy under the restraint, for the skins of the spiritual man were not by any means thick. He looked gratefully at her, stopped singing in deference to her request, and asked her if she would like another cup of tea. Then he unlaced and kicked off his boots, and stole upstairs. Miss Dupins took advantage of his absence to pour the second cup of stewed tea into a pot that held ferns, in order that she might ask for a third when he returned. She meant to stay with him as long as she could. Suppose Babette were actually dying? Well, in that case, it was not at all likely that she could be of much use, but she wouldn't run away. She might not be able to stop his running amuck, but she would try. No doubt she was school-mistressy, no doubt she had been "too superior" and narrow and hard, but at least she had grit in her. She was not of the poor sort who will let a hope go by because it is most forlorn.

Presently he came back again. He stood in the doorway like a shamefaced boy and looked at her appealingly.

"I didn't go in. I'm scared of those nurses," he said. "I—I believe Barbara's dead. It's infernally still. Will you go to see? It's the third door on the first floor along the passage to your left."

Miss Dupins went at once. It was strange to be stealing up the staircase of this strange house. She went along the passage and paused. She did not like to open the door, but stood listening for any reassuring sound. It was appallingly quiet. Jethro had stopped all sounds of hammering at the works, and not even the clock on the landing ticked, for he had unhitched the pendulum only that morning.

At last a nurse came out, carrying a basin with ice

in a muslin bag. She was surprised at the sight of the tall lady in black.

"How is she?" Miss Dupins asked in a whisper.

"Asleep for the last hour," said the nurse; "temperature gone right down. She'll be all right now." She yawned. "Are you any relative? Things do want looking after here. They never bring up my tea punctually. I ought to be going off duty and leaving Nurse Andrews in charge. Would it be possible for you to speak to Mr. Cole about our meals?"

Miss Dupins did not stop to answer the question, but ran down the stairs as quickly as if she were seventeen. She felt as if she carried a release to someone stretched on a rack.

Jethro Cole was sitting with his elbows on the table and his head on his hands.

"Well—is she dead?" he asked gruffly.

"She has been asleep for the last hour. She'll be all right now, nurse says; the temperature has gone right down," said Miss Dupins.

His head went down again on his hands. Miss Dupins turned her back on him, and arranged her veil before the ugly gilt mirror on the mantelpiece.

"I must be getting back now. Thank you so much for giving me tea," said she. "No," in answer to a muttered suggestion, "don't bother about going with me to the station. I know my way quite well." She put on her gloves deliberately; her deliberation gave him time to recover himself. "I am pleased to hear that she is sleeping," she said quietly.

Her heart was beating fast with relief; she was pleased indeed!

Her host stood up, and stretched his arms and straightened his shoulders with the gesture of one who throws down a burden.

"I'm afraid I've been making a fine to do," said he. "I believe I was a bit anxious."

"Yes, I think that perhaps you were," said Miss Dupins.

"But Barbara don't like me, you know. I've been a bad father, and she hasn't got over it. I thought she had; but you should have heard her shriek at me to 'go away!'"

"But the poor child was delirious," said Miss Dupins. "You should never think twice about that." She hesitated a second, then added rather shyly: "I can quite imagine that there can scarcely be a much dearer or more precious relationship than that between father and daughter at its best. I prophesy that you and your daughter will be great friends."

"Well, I'd like it to be like that," said Jethro. "I don't know that there is anything I'd like better; but I began badly. I've a bad record! It's only quite lately that I've come to understand how bad it all was. It shocked you, didn't it?"

"Yes, it did," she owned.

He looked suddenly old and tired and depressed.

"The fact is, one can't do away with what has been," he said. "One fancies one can, but the more understanding one gets, the more one knows that one can't. One thing governs another; besides, if one once takes to behaving differently, one *sees* differently, too, and what wasn't so bad at the time seems so d——d mean later on!"

The tears rose to Miss Dupins' eyes.

"Oh yes, I know! I've felt that, too," she said.

"You! You've never been bad!" he cried.

"Oh, I have! I have!" said she. "I've judged so harshly that I've deserved harsh judgment myself. But let us take comfort, for the world is not ruled by the hard and fast judgments of men, but by the ever living and growing mercies of God."

"Lord! but that takes a lot of believing," said Jethro Cole. Then he smiled. "Thank you, all the same. I think you are very kind," he said.

He stood for a minute at the hall-door, watching her go up the street, with the smile still on his lips.

She *was* kind, and a very good woman, though not quite his sort, he felt.

As he turned indoors Mrs. Higgins came up to him.

"That nurse come down just now to say as Miss Cole has woken up and took her arrowroot well, but won't be satisfied without she sees you," she said.

## CHAPTER X

BABETTE lay in a chaise longue in a strip of orchard. Behind the orchard was a long, low, pink-washed cottage, and she looked down between the branches of apple-trees and saw blue glimpses of sun-flecked water, and heard the long roll and break of the Atlantic on the shore. The cottage and the orchard were very homely and sweet, but the sound of the sea had mystery in it, and high adventures, and tragedy and ecstasy.

The sun-filled air smelt deliciously of brine and of grass and leaves too. The vegetation grew to the edge of the land here, and the beauty of the place brought tears to Babette's eyes. She had always been easily touched by beauty, and she was not yet quite strong; a little made her laugh or cry.

She looked very small and fragile as she lay back on the pillows of her chair. Her hair, that had been cropped short, curled on her forehead again and hid the ugly scar. The delicate pink of convalescence came and went easily. Though there had been moments when she had passionately wished that she were dead, she was certainly glad now that she was alive. Her father had sent her to this Cornish farmstead in a sheltered cove. Her mother had lived near here before her marriage, and Babette inherited a love of the south coast. She loved the peacock colours of the sea, and the bushes of fuchsias, and the softness of the air, and the ways of the people. Yes, it was good to be alive, and to feel the curious sense of being new born in a strangely sweet world that is part of convalescence

after severe illness. London and Mary Anne, strenuous endeavour in poky back streets, funerals and factories, all seemed to have faded into distance; sometimes as she lay watching the glint of blue through the emerald leaves, she could almost believe that such things were unrealities and had never been. But that was only sometimes; and as she daily grew stronger her thoughts took another complexion.

Miss Dupins was with her. Jethro Cole had asked her if she would go to take care of his girl, and she had acceded willingly to the request, only refusing to let him pay her expenses.

"I've always felt attracted by Babette," she said, "and I need a change myself. If she likes to have me with her we will take a holiday together, but you shall not spend any money on me, for I could not possibly allow that."

"Oh, you've learnt how to give, but not how to take," he had remarked shrewdly. "Never mind, *I* ain't so proud! Barbara will like to have a lady with her. She's happiest with that sort; she enjoys all their little ways."

"Babette is a lady," Miss Dupins said quickly.

So here they were established in this sunny corner, and never were companions more unlike, or, on the whole, more companionable. Miss Dupins grew quickly fond of the girl. The temperament that was so unlike her own had great fascination for her. She had never allowed herself to be possessed by moods, but Babette was as variable as the summer sea, sometimes very merry, sometimes very sad, but always quickly responsive and sympathetic to anyone for whom she had a liking. Miss Dupins opined, too, that there were strong and persistent undercurrents of feeling that flowed beneath these surface variations. She divined that because she had become fond of Babette, and love is the great Diviner. He pretends to be blind, but indeed he sees through more than stone walls.

"I think you must feel it a happy thing to be safe,



to have no more secrets, to possess your pleasures unspoilt," she said one day to Babette.

"Oh yes, I take a great deal of pleasure in life," Babette responded brightly. "I think I have always done that; I enjoy lots of things very much indeed—but happiness—that's different! If granddad were really to forgive me I should be happy, but he hasn't yet, he is still sore and miserable. To be happy one must be at peace."

"Sir Hubert took the matter very much to heart, but he writes kindly of you," said Miss Dupins; "I had a letter from him only the other day. He wrote that he rejoiced to hear of your recovery. I am sure that he wishes you well."

"Oh, of course he wishes me well!" said Babette with a sigh. "Poor granddad! He hasn't got over it in the least! If he had—if he had only begun to forgive me—I should feel the difference directly!"

"But I think that you are morbid about that, Babette," said Miss Dupins gravely. "You cannot really know what Sir Hubert is feeling. That is a foolish fancy."

Babette acquiesced. She was never argumentative.

"Yes. Perhaps it is foolish. It sounds a very silly thing to say, certainly. I suppose it is fancy, but I used to feel the same about my stepfather. I was fond of him, you know. When I was a little girl I was fonder of him than of anyone, and if he was put out with me, it was as if there was a black fog over my spirits; He never scolded me, either; But don't let's talk about that, let's talk about something nicer. I wonder if the bogey-man will come to-morrow? I hope that he will, don't you?"

She called Jethro Cole the bogey-man. It was a name he had instituted himself, seeing that "father" could never come quite easily to her lips. It was characteristic of them both to turn the old terror into a joke, and Babette was daily becoming more friendly

with him. She was learning to read his moods, as she had read her stepfather's and Sir Hubert's. Delicate threads of sympathy were being spun between them. Her intuition often surprised him. He was pleased to see her when he came down at the week's end, but she noticed at once that something was perturbing him. He was not quite at ease at dinner, eyeing his daughter with an odd, dubious expression, and talking little. After the meal was finished they went out into the orchard, and Miss Dupins wrapped a shawl round Babette's shoulders.

"She does us credit, does she not? but do not let her stand too long. I am going down to the jetty to watch the fishing boats come in. Take care of her," said Miss Dupins.

Jethro Cole laughed.

"She's fond of you, Barbara," he remarked, as the tall figure wended its way between the apple trees.

"Why don't she have children of her own, eh? A good woman that."

Babette nodded. "Oh yes, very. Miss Dupins never did anything to be ashamed of in her life, I believe! Not like *us*, you know! but she likes us both." Her eyes began to laugh. "Do you wish to marry her, bogey-man?" she asked. "I am sure that you have something on your mind to-night, something that you don't know how to tell me. Can it be that?"

"No, it's not that. That's over," he said coolly. "She won't do it! I asked her, but she won't: I put it to her very straight. Though it may seem a bit of a risk, still we might get a warmer kind of satisfaction out of it," I said. "And I'm never one to shirk a risk myself, but no, she wouldn't—and perhaps she's right. But a very good woman all the same!"

They were silent for a minute, then, "Is the Tylerine business going wrong?" Babette inquired.

"Good lord, no! It's heaping up money," said he. "You and I must talk over that later on. You'll have to give me tips about spending it, eh, Barbara? Poor

old Mary Anne Tavey would say I was flourishing like the green bay tree, but I don't know! I'm not so set on a big pile as some folks are! *That* was never what I cared most for."

He sighed, and Babette slid her fingers into his. She understood that the bogey-man was really lonely.

"But what is the matter, then?" she asked. "I know there is something. Is it anything that I may be sorry about too? Because we *are* partners now, aren't we?"

Jethro looked at his daughter very kindly. He was always surprised to find how much he cared for her.

"Well, Barbara, there's nothing wrong with me. It's for you I'm bothered," said he. "For females are such kittle cattle! Whether it's as friends or as wives or as daughters, they're such kittle cattle! You don't know always how they'll take things! I don't care about bringing you bad news, for you ain't the sensible sort, and I don't want you ill on my hands again."

He spoke in a somewhat scolding tone, and to his dismay the girl's colour ebbed.

"You are going to tell me that the *Cygnet* has gone down, and that he is drowned," Babette said in low clear tones.

Jethro stared at her in genuine surprise.

"The *Cygnet*? I don't know anything about that. What's the *Cygnet* to do with us?" said he. "No, no, I've heard nothing about drowning. It's about Sir Hubert Redstone. That pretence aunt of yours, the one you called Aunt Julie, has written to me about him. She puts in a letter for you, and she would have written to you direct, but that she knew you'd been so ill that she thought better of it. She thought someone had better break the news to you. I don't know that it's any better for being broken. One may as well have it shied at one in the lump if it has to be. The old man had been ailing for some time, but he got some crank about going to see his son's grave, and nothing else would satisfy him. So they all went. Sir Hubert and

Miss Redstone, and the other one (the one who didn't like you) and——"

He came to a stop and looked deprecatingly at her, for Babette was trembling all over.

"There! I don't know how to break things," he said, "but I wish you hadn't got so fond of the old man! After all, why should you be? He *wasn't* your kin."

"No. I stole his affection—but at least I gave him mine," said poor Babette. "Is Sir Hubert dead?"

Her father nodded.

She sat down in the long chair, and resting her chin on her hands, stared with unseeing eyes at a world from which the sunlight seemed suddenly to have gone.

"Oh! I wish I could have been with him! I wish I might have seen granddad once more! He was so good to me, he—he was so fond of me. Yet it would have been of no use, no use at all," she said sadly.

Jethro sighed too.

"It seems someone must always pay somewhere when a crooked thing has been done," said he. "But it would appear to work out fairer if it was so managed that only the one who originally acted crookedly paid! Why, you poor girl, you are taking it hard! and I wish you wouldn't, for at the beginning it was all my fault."

"No, it was mine," said Babette. "Will you give me Aunt Julie's letter, please, and let me read it by myself? I want to be alone for a little while."

He put the letter into her hand.

"There! But don't fret yourself into a fever again. I don't want you to do that, nor yet to go thinking you'd be better dead," said he, "for, after all, life's good, and it's big, Barbara. It's a much bigger job than you've any idea of yet, my dear."

He put his arm for a moment about her shoulders and gave her a rough hug, then went off through the apple-trees, leaving her to read her letter by herself.

It was a long letter, for Miss Redstone had a fluent

pen, and expressed herself easily ; also, for all that had been said and done, she loved Babette.

"My dearest father died at Madame Berne's boarding-house, in the very room—I believe in the very bed—on which your stepfather died," she wrote. "He had been ailing for some time. On the morning of the day before his death he said to me, 'I dreamed of Stephen last night. He was walking along playing on a flute, with that little Babette by his side. They came along a path that ran across a meadow, and at the bottom of the meadow there was a row of poplars and a stream. My son looked tired and old, and Babette's boots had holes in them, and her clothes were shabby.' I said to him, 'Really, Stephen, you might have seen that that child had better boots! She's quite footsore, she walks with a limp, and you are to blame for that.' And he said to me, 'I meant well by her ; but we're all a blind lot—blind as bats! blind as bats! We don't know what we do!'

"Then I asked my father if he had a message for you, Babette—for he knew that he would not live to get home—but he did not hear me. He had become rather deaf latterly. I am convinced, however, that he must have been thinking of you with renewed gentleness. He died of heart failure, but there was no great suffering. I know, dear child, that you have a sensitive nature like my own—though, after all, you are not my niece—and that you will grieve very much for him. My dearest father is to be buried at Compiègne near my brother Stephen's grave, where you and I stood together. For my own part, I should like to have you by me at his funeral, but I fear that my sister Harriet would not quite like the suggestion."

"No, she would hate it!" Babette said with conviction. "And quite right, too. I hate myself!"

Then she covered her face with her hands.

"Blind as bats, blind as bats, and we don't know what we do," she repeated ; and the tears dropped fast and faster through her fingers.

Presently, however, she put the letter in her pocket and dried her eyes and went slowly down to the beach to look for her father. He had been so kind, she remembered gratefully, and Babette, though she had done many wrong things in the course of her short life, had never once repulsed a kindness. She found him sitting in the sandy cove, smoking and staring at the sea.

"Pretty, ain't it?" he remarked, as she joined him. "France is all very well in its way, but, taking it all round, it ain't a patch on England."

Babette sat down by his side and let the silver sand trickle through her fingers. Even this short walk through the orchard and on to the shore had tired her. She was glad to lean against the boat.

The rose of sunset was fading, one star pierced through where the sky was a tender green rather than blue, the sea was full of soft colours as a dove's breast. Babette had come down to the cove, meaning to consult with Jethro Cole about the repapering and decoration of his house, but the grave and peaceful sweetness of the fading sky touched them both, and their interest in patterns and estimates was somewhat forced.

"We aren't in tune for these little jobs now. I'll put the papers by till to-morrow," he said. "Well, Barbara, are you hankering after crossing the ditch and going to the old man's funeral? I'll take you if you wish it."

Babette shook her head.

"No, I've no right there. Some day I should like to go to Compiègne again. I want to see that my step-father's grave is nicely kept. He liked flowers. He might like me to plant some there. But we mustn't go now. We should have to hide behind a tree if we went for fear Aunt Harriet—Mrs. Durnham, I mean—should see us and feel outraged. My presence would seem like an insult to her, and one can't insult people at funerals. Besides, you are much too big to hide."

"As to not having the right, I'm not so sure about

that, Barbara," said he. "You were truly fond of that old chap, and I suspect that counts for something in the end. Anyhow, that's what you said to me once. 'There's other relationships than flesh and blood,' you said, 'and being my natural father don't make any difference when you've never played a father's part.'"

"Did I ever say that? It doesn't sound like me. How horrid of me! But I don't remember saying it," said Babette. "Certainly I don't feel like that now."

"You said something like it, even if those weren't the exact words," he insisted. "And it's quite true. That's why I winced."

They were both silent for a while, reflecting not very cheerfully on what had been done, and could never be undone. Then the man asked suddenly:

"Why did you suppose I was going to tell you that someone had been drowned, eh?"

"Why? Oh, I don't know. When one is startled one thinks of the very worst thing that could possibly happen," said she. Then, seeing that he was busily revolving her words in his mind, she added quickly: "I don't want to talk any more of what I am telling you, please, Bogey-Man; but I'll just tell you, and then we will bury the subject here."

She scooped a hole in the sand with her fingers, and glanced up at him.

He nodded. "All right, Barbara, I'm safe—and your father after all."

"When you told me you were bringing me bad news, I thought that Siegfried was drowned," she said, and shuddered.

"Oh, d——n it," said he. "Then we aren't clear of that blessed family yet! Does he want you, my girl?"

"He wants to marry me when he comes home," said Babette. "It would be impossible, though. I never was good enough, and—and he shouldn't marry

damaged goods, and his mother would hate it. I don't blame her," Babette added. "She knows that her father never really got over the shock of finding that I was not his grandchild. I—I think it killed him. Certainly I am not worth the trouble I cost him. When I think of all that, I feel she's right, and I hate myself."

"Nonsense!" said he roughly. "Damaged goods—you're not that, my dear! If any man said you were I'd knock his teeth down his throat for him. But, all the same, I'm not at all sorry it's impossible, for I don't want you to marry anybody. We shall do very well as we are, I take it. Now we have come together, let's stick together, eh, daughter?"

"Yes, father," said she.

"We'll make the best job we can of it," he went on earnestly. "You are young, and I don't see that you were so bad, either!" he sighed. "I wish I was your age, Barbara, with my life before me, and facing the hill up instead of the hill down." He sighed heavily. "I'm deadly keen on the Tylerine, but there are times when I'm discouraged. Other men will carry it on, and develop the business after I'm dead. It's a pity I didn't start on the right tack much sooner. Then I might have had a son to come after me and take it on. Besides, I get thinking about your mother now and the way she died. If one could just pay for one's own sins——"

"I know," said Babette sadly. "Oh, dear Bogey-Man, I know! The good people pay, and that fills us with shame. We feel we aren't worth it. But then, if someone believes very much in us, that makes a difference."

"Look! The sea is coming into your hole. We must move on," said Jethro.

He stood up and held out his hand to her.

"You're still shaky on your legs," he said. "What queer things girls are! Interesting in their way, too," he added gravely.



Babette laughed in spite of her melancholy.

"He would say that there is nothing so jolly interesting as watching how things grow and that," said she.

"He! Who's he? Do you mean Providence?" said Jethro Cole.

"No, oh no! I wasn't meaning Providence," said Babette; "though," she added with unusual gravity, "I have felt lately as if He did believe very much in us too, even when we've no opinion left of ourselves."

Jethro Cole shook his head doubtfully.

"Life's wonderful," he said, "and there's no knowing what mayn't come of it. "You're young, so of course anything may happen to you. I'd like to stand by you in the future, Barbara. I don't know but what we shan't suit each other rather well."

He kicked the sand into the already half-filled hole from which the wave had receded.

"There! Your secret is buried as you wished," he said. "But I'd never be sure that there won't be a resurrection one day," he added with a rueful sigh, for already the love in him had a premonition of sacrifice.

A tiny yellow evening moth, with delicate wings that were grey underneath, fluttered before them as they mounted the hillock. It was only just free of the chrysalis.

"What a darling! It reminds me of something someone said once. I am very glad that the whole world is so alive," said Babette.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is late summer, almost autumn, as I write the last words of this story. Two or three butterflies still flutter in the garden, but soon their delicate little lives will be nipped by the cold, and the quivering wings that so lately beat free of the chrysalis will be still, and the tiny sparks of life will have flown back to their primal source. They did not have a very long flutter, those wonderful little beings, on whom has been bestowed so

exquisite a workmanship, and who went through such remarkable, and one would think uncomfortable, phases before they acquired their wings. For my part, I hope that there are plenty of butterflies as well as flowers in heaven; as for story-tellers, I think they will have enough to do, if ever they get there.

F. F. M.

THE END



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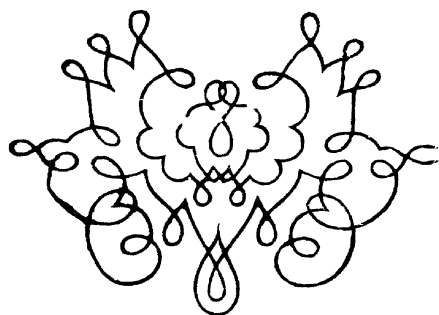
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